LITERACY PRACTICES OF ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS AT A UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

BY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation reports on a study involving English Second Language first year students at a University of Technology. In this study, I argue that English Second Language first year students' early literacy practices have an influence on their academic literacy. Sociocultural theory serves as the theoretical framework, and, using four data generation methods I aimed at eliciting participants' stories on what they considered to have been their early literacy practices and how they understood those practices to have influenced their current academic literacy, was used. The participants were able to narrate their stories clearly through the varied data generation methods. This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, allowing me to hear and understand participants' perceived realities on their early and current literacy practices. Participants realised that their academic performance was shaped by their home literacy environment, and primary and secondary education. They understood that even though an English rich home literacy environment and English-medium schools might have better prepared some of them to comprehend English at university, academic literacy, particularly academic writing, remained a foreign concept with which they all seemed to grapple. Participants were aware that they needed to adapt to the new university literacies and that they were largely responsible for the assimilation of these university literacies in order to perform positively. Additionally, participants felt empowered to participate in this study, as it allowed them introspection, awakened the desire to improve academically and enabled a cathartic experience, as some were able to let go of negative past events, which affected present literacy experiences. One implication from the findings is the acknowledgement that fluency in English does not necessarily imply competency in academic literacy and academic writing. This dissertation adds to the discourse on academic literacy and English Second Language first year students' literacies, by demonstrating that the combination of an interpretive paradigm together with sociocultural theory, enables an understanding of the literacy practices of English Second Language first year students at a University of Technology.

KEYWORDS: Literacy; Home literacy environment; Academic literacy; Sociocultural theory

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation focusses on the literacy practices of English Second Language (ESL) first year students at a University of Technology (UoT). The study aims to explore and understand students' early literacy practices, including their Home Literacy Environment (HLE) and school literacy practices. The dissertation also aims to ascertain if there is a link between students' early literacy practices and their current experiences of academic literacy. Rose (2005) argues that there is a relationship that exists between early exposure to literacy in the home and children's performance in later literacy practices in the school; he asserts that one thousand hours of reading that the children are exposed to before formal school through access to reading material from the home put those children at a language advantage compared to those children who encounter literacy practices for the first time at school.

When students are denied rich early literacy practices, it usually becomes evident in the poor academic results and performance displayed by some ESL first year university students' academic writing (McKenna, 2010). In South Africa, English or Afrikaans are the mediums of instruction at institutions of higher learning, yet, the majority of South African students at these institutions speak English or Afrikaans as a second or third language (Banda, 2009; McKenna, 2004). Probyn (2010) highlights the fact that only 12% of South African students speak English as a first language. The past decade has seen a rapid development of studies aimed at understanding the literacy practices of ESL university students in many countries and different academic disciplines, as the challenges that ESL students face is a global phenomenon (Singh, 2015).

This chapter introduces the study by outlining the purpose, motivation and context of the study. In addition, an overview of key studies dealing with the topic is given. The research objectives and questions that guided this study are then stated, followed by an overview of the research process and limitations of the research. Finally, this chapter gives a synopsis of the structure of this dissertation.

1.2 Rationale/Motivation

My interest in the study stems from my experiences as an ESL and First Language (FL) educator for the past sixteen years; a marker and a senior marker for Grade 12 English First Additional Language (FAL); an assessor and lecturer for Communication Skills and Communication Modules for ESL and FL students at different UoTs; as well as being a marker for Academic Literacy modules for university students. It is as an Academic Literacy marker and lecturer that I have observed that some students seem to encounter challenges, such as the inability to express their arguments through the medium of English in a logical, coherent manner, free from grammatical errors. Some of the ESL first year UoT students' academic writing displays a lack of instruction comprehension, yielding inappropriate responses that negatively influence their academic performance. This study was thus an attempt to understand these challenges, and to consider whether students' early literacy experiences influenced their literacy practices in the later years.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore the literacy practices of ESL first year students at a UoT in order to understand the influence of the students' early literacy experiences on their current academic literacy. Literacy practices refer to different forms of literacy experiences that students experience in the home before going to school, in school, and ultimately at a university (Wagner, Torgesen, & Rashotte, 1994; Wagner Torgesen, & Rashotte, 1997; Antilla, 2013). This study therefore traces the students' HLE, school literacy and academic literacy, as literacy practices from these different literacy environments are intertwined. Early exposure to literacy practices influences students' general academic performance (Rose, 2005; Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015), and this study could help understand students' early literacy practices and could potentially assist in understanding current academic practices.

Recent developments in university students' academic literacy practices have heightened the need for intervention through research in order to unearth challenges that some ESL first year university students encounter regarding academic literacy, as displayed by some students' negative academic performance (Singh, 2015). Different studies (Chokwe, 2011; Nel and Müller, 2010) have shown a relationship between first year university students' school literacy practices and their overall academic performance. This relationship has sparked interest and debates over the past decade around ESL first year students' preparedness for university

literacy practices both nationally (Chokwe, 2011; Cliff & Hanslo, 2009) and internationally (Tom, Morni, Metom & Joe, 2013).

1.4 Context/ Background

Students' literacy practices are rooted within the context of education in South Africa (SA) that still bears the mark of the apartheid regime, under which education was meant to emphasise political control over an increasingly "unruly black" population while "spilling" out the necessary skills for a changing economy, under a number of apartheid laws (Bloch, 2009, p. 44). The legacy of apartheid laws is still evident in post-apartheid South African education. The correlation between education, wealth and social class means that, although SA is now a democratic country, the schools that were traditionally attended by whites during apartheid are today usually better equipped; these schools have teachers that are more effective, have greater opportunities, and are still more functional than those that served and continue to serve blacks (Spaull, 2013). The legacy of apartheid laws is still evident in post-apartheid SA education even though there have been attempts by the democratic government to redress the imbalances in education.

The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of South Africa has a role to play with regard to some ESL school learners' and consequently university students' literacy practices. The LiEP of 1997 (DoE, 9 May, 1997) had noble intentions, such as to acknowledge the right of all learners to receive education in a language of their choice in public educational institutions where it is reasonably practicable, to promote and develop all 11 official languages where all language subjects shall receive equitable time and resource allocation and vernacular instruction for critical literacy development. Learners from Grade 1 to Grade 4 were therefore to receive instruction in their mother tongue, a practice still prevalent in South Africa. However, the LiEP policy, through mother tongue instruction in the junior phase, is largely contributing to ESL students' inferior literacy practices, particularly because from Grade 5 the medium of instruction in schools is either English or Afrikaans, which is not mother tongue to all South Africans (Berthoud & Lüdi, 2010; Cook, 2013).

The controversy about the LiEP and its mother tongue instruction for the betterment and benefit of all learners linguistically has raged unabated for over a century (Rose, 2004).

Questions have been raised about the practicality of the LiEP which is ideal, yet still unattainable (Alexander, 2004).

In an attempt to assist those learners encountering English language challenges, teachers in township and rural schools code switch from a language of instruction to the learners' vernacular language (Samarakoon, 2017). However, universities in South Africa use either English or Afrikaans as their medium of instruction. Even though the students at the UoT where the study is conducted mainly experience English as a medium of instruction, English remains their second or third language. It is against this backdrop that this study takes place.

The university where the study is conducted is in a city and comprises four different campuses. The majority of the students are black and speak English as either a second or a third language. Most of these students come from underprivileged communities due to parental unemployment. The majority of the African students come from rural areas and townships. Each year comprises two semesters with some modules being offered per semester and others as annual modules. This study is located within the Department of Languages, Communication and Media. The participants in the study are a group of students from the Tourism Department, who study Communication 1, which is one of their annual modules. Each module offered at the university requires that students demonstrate efficiency, particularly in academic writing, as it is one of the assessment methods used by the University for students' progression to the next level.

1.5 Overview of key studies dealing with the topic

This study draws from and builds on various research studies; the following studies have been identified and examined as key studies that shaped this study. Antilla (2013) argues that the Home Literacy Environment (HLE) is the initial literacy environment where a child gets exposed to literacy by his or her parents prior to school, and the study by Chu and Wu (2010) attributed learners' parental education background as a determining factor to learners' preparedness or under preparedness to master school literacies. Studies by Bloch (2009) and Spaull (2013) found that the South African education system still suffers the effects of apartheid, as reflected in the unequal distribution of human resources, as former Model C schools still have better qualified teachers as opposed to rural or township schools (that have black students). A study by Clegg and Afitska (2011) revealed that under-qualification by

teachers to teach a European language and learners' lack of fluency in a European language remain a common challenge within the education departments in sub-Saharan Africa. Behrens, Allard and Caroli (2016) noted that academic writing remains a challenge for ESL first year university students due to a number of factors, such as students' lack of academic writing competencies and lecturers' lack of linguistic training amongst others. Boakye, Sommerville and Debusho (2014) found that ESL students enter universities lacking academic reading skills due to under-preparedness. While these studies are explored in detail in the Literature Review, the studies are mentioned at this point to contextualise the research related to the topic of this dissertation.

1.6 Research objectives and questions

The objectives of this study are:

1. To explore English Second Language first year University of Technology students' experiences of literacy practices.
2. To understand how English Second Language first year University of Technology students recognise the influences of their early literacy practices on their current academic literacy.

This dissertation seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are English Second Language first year University of Technology students' experiences of literacy practices?
2. How are English Second Language first year University of Technology students' past literacy practices and how do they enable and/ or constrain their current academic literacy?

1.7 Overview of the research process

In order to answer the research questions, the study used sociocultural theory (discussed in chapter two) and was framed by an interpretivist research paradigm, a narrative research design and a qualitative research approach (discussed in chapter three). The choices made allowed me to analyse, interpret and understand the participants' own narrations of their literacy experiences that influenced their current academic practices in order to retell their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin, 2000; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007; Clandinin, 2013).

Qualitative data generation methods, in line with narrative research (using artefacts, metaphors, literate life histories and a focus group), were used to assist participants elicit their stories on their early and current literacy practices and the influence their early literacies have on their current literacies while deepening and broadening my understanding of these stories. In order to ensure that participants and I co-composed the entire research text, participants were given constant feedback after each layer of data analysis.

While the qualitative research approach allowed participants to explore their experiences of literacy practices, the in-depth and flexible nature of narrative research, afforded participants enough opportunities to tell and retell their stories.

1.8 Researcher's stance

By virtue of this being narrative research, I was part of the research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), as I was making sense of it in order to understand and interpret the participants' stories. I therefore used a first person narrative perspective in narrating the participants' stories. I am aware that such a perspective could be a limitation. However, recognising my role in the process more accurately describes this research effort. I have involved participants from the commencement of the research - from the generation of data, to the composition of field texts - understanding that my role is to understand their stories. Ongoing feedback allowed the participants to authenticate their stories in order that their voices on individual and shared literacy practices were clear and well understood.

I have learnt to understand that my immediate environment, particularly my family and other factors have shaped my linguistic choices and consequently academic performance. This has therefore made me realise that what learners manifest in the classroom is rooted in the learners' socio-political and socioeconomic background. Therefore, in order for a language to be acquired and assimilated by students, it needs to make sense to the students' everyday life, as opposed to being foreign or abstract (Ntiri, 2009; Godin, 2017). This research has also made me empathise with participants, and consequently ESL students in general, who might not have been privileged to get exposure to the English language at an early age and attended schools that might have failed to assist them grow linguistically. As a lecturer, it does remain a challenge to bridge the gap between the students' literacy experiences and the expected university literacies, necessitating dedication and the ability to go the extra mile, in delivering linguistic aid to ESL students.

1.9 Delimitations

Even though English Second Language (ESL), a term generally used internationally, is currently known as English First Additional Language (FAL) at schools, in line with the South African Department of Basic Education's directive, for the purposes of this study, I will be referring to participants' engagement with English as a second language.

While I am aware that a very basic definition of literacy refers the ability to read and write, which could be in any language, and I am not equating literacy to English, for the purposes of this study, literacy will be referring to English literacy. This study seeks to explore literacy practices of ESL students at the UoT. This university uses English as a medium of instruction therefore, students' academic literacy practices and overall academic performance is dependent on their English language knowledge. It is in understanding the participants' own unique early literacies (from their own mother tongues) that the influences of these literacies on their current academic literacy will be meaningful.

Literacy practices could incorporate various linguistic aspects, but this study will only consider the university literacy practices to include academic writing and reading, due to the fact that academic writing is a product of reading and it is largely in the demonstration of a good piece of writing that university students' linguistic competencies and academic performance are assessed.

1.10   Organisation of the dissertation

The dissertation has been divided into five chapters in order to interpret the findings adequately and answer the two research questions. The first chapter introduces the dissertation by providing background information to the study and sets out the research questions that need to be answered. Chapter two begins by laying out the theoretical dimension of the research then explores scholarly literature relevant to this study. Chapter three describes the methodology of the study by discussing the paradigm, approach and design of the study while providing substantiation for the relevance thereof. In addition, the sample and the data generation methods are discussed in terms of their relevance to the study. Chapter four focusses on a detailed discussion of findings and Chapter five concludes this dissertation by outlining the summary, implications and limitations of the study. Recommendations for further research are then suggested.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the theory and the concepts that underpin this study, and evaluates literature relevant to this study. Firstly, I will describe, and evaluate the theoretical framework that underpins this study, namely, sociocultural theory. Secondly, I will define and discuss key concepts of academic literacy while reviewing literature from scholarly articles related to literacy practices of English Second Language (ESL) first year students at universities. Thirdly, I will locate this study in the South African schooling context while reviewing scholarly sources in relation to the study.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by Sociocultural Theory that has its roots in the writings of a Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978). I am considering three major tenets of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2007). The first tenet is that cognitive development is mediated, the second tenet is the Zone of Proximal Development model (ZPD), and the last tenet is the use of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978).

2.2.1 Mediation of cognitive development

Vygotsky (1978) argues that child development occurs in two locations, externally from social interactions and internally, within the child. Sociocultural theory operates from the premise that mediation aids learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Mediation is a role played by the significant others in the learners' or children's lives by enhancing the children's learning through choosing and influencing the learning experiences presented to them (Vygotsky, 1978). In my study, these significant others include parents, caregivers, family members and teachers.

Vygotsky's ideas have influenced both the field of psychology and the field of education as he argues that even though biological factors are a precondition to a child's fundamental development process, sociocultural factors such as the home and the environment, amongst others, are an atmosphere where the basic natural process for child development takes place (Vygotsky, 1978). Correspondingly, Chu and Wu (2010) cite Hammer and Miccio, (2004) and

Martinez-Rodan and Malave, (2004) as asserting that various factors such as sociocultural and ecological factors are instrumental in the process of the child's literacy development as interactions between humans, and humans and their environments, influence learning. Sociocultural theory is suitable for my study as it will enable me to explore participants' literacy practices from early literacy in the home (where the early linguistic interaction between children and parents takes place), to school (where linguistic interaction between teachers and learners, and learners and their peers take place). It will also assist in understanding how the participants understand the influences of their early literacy practices on their current academic literacy.

As parents impart culture and beliefs to their children, they make use of cultural artefacts such as language in order for a psychological process of internalisation to take place (Vygotsky, 1978; Turuk, 2008; Thorn, 2007). Internalisation is a negotiated process that reorganises the relationship of the individual to her or his social environment and generally carries it into future performance (Turuk, 2008). The first step towards a child's knowledge acquisition is through direct contact and interaction with people (Vygotsky, 1978). This step is referred to as the interpsychological plane, where a child receives knowledge from people. Thereafter, the child internalises knowledge while adding her own value, which is called the intrapsychological plane (Vygotsky, 1978; Werest, 1985; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). In other words, knowledge acquisition is not a mere copy but a transformation of what has been learnt through interaction, into personal values (Vygotsky, 1978). Students therefore do not copy their teachers' capabilities but they interact with what their teachers have taught them individualistically to develop their own capabilities (Vygotsky, 1978).

As children develop, the parents will influence children's actions through set rules that they in turn inherited from their parents through their culture (Vygotsky, 1978). By so doing, parents transmit culture from their generation to the younger generation thus becoming representatives of culture (Vygotsky, 1978; Turuk, 2008). Since these cultural and historical beliefs are passed on from one generation to next, using a language, they are subject to modification as each generation will adapt them to suit their needs as individuals and communities (Turuk, 2008).

2.2.2 Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Vygotsky (1978) posits that the nature of the social interaction between two or more people with different levels of skills and knowledge yields effective learning. The ZPD therefore takes place when the social interaction occurs between a student and a more knowledgeable individual in a particular subject matter (Vygotsky, 1978). This interaction involves helping the learner to move into and through the next level of knowledge or understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). Language is a useful tool that assists learners as they move into and through their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). ZPD therefore, refers to the distance between a child's actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Sociocultural theory sees language development as a process that takes place through involvement in cultural, linguistic, and historically formed settings such as family life, peer group interaction, and in institutional contexts like schooling and sports, amongst others (Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015). The home environment, plays a crucial role in young children's language and literacy acquisition, as they may benefit from early exposure to various reading and writing activities (Chu & Wu, 2010). For this reason, the development of children's reading, writing, speaking and listening skills are dependent on the different home literacy environments (Chu & Wu, 2010), hence, the emphasis on the importance of what the learner brings to any learning situation as an active meaning making and problem-solving tool (Lantolf *et al*., 2015). Lynch (2007), cites Vygotsky (1978) who posits that interacting with a more knowledgeable person enhances learning. Parents thus aid their children's performance as they model the expected answers the children need to provide, in response to the parents' questions. Sociocultural theory is therefore relevant to my study as I trace the participants' literacy practices from the home which determines the children's preparedness level to receive school instruction.

Sociocultural theory recognises the dynamic nature of the relationship among teachers, learners and tasks, and provides a view of learning as growing from interactions with others (Turuk, 2008). This theory acknowledges that learners' early experiences and influences from learners' different environments (Vygotsky, 1978) have a major role to play on their literacy practices at schools and, subsequently, academic performance pertaining to learning both a First Language (FL) and a Second Language (SL). Thus, resonating with my study, the literacy

practices the ESL students bring to school, from their families, will influence their academic literacy (Rose, 2004).

Sociocultural theory argues that human mental functioning is primarily a facilitated process that is influenced by cultural objects, events, and ideas (Lantolf *et al*., 2015). This theory thus relates to my study as early literacies are events and ideas that children bring to school from the home. It is through the understanding of these literacy practices (from the home, school and a UoT) that I intend getting clarity as to the ESL first year students' experiences of literacy practices, in order to address my two research questions. Sociocultural theory understands humans to apply existing cultural pieces to create new ones that permit them to adjust their biological and behavioural activity (Lantolf *et al*., 2015).

The ZPD has captivated educators and psychologists for a number of reasons; one reason is the notion of assisted performance, which, although not equivalent to the ZPD, has been the driving force behind much of the interest in Vygotsky's research (Lantolf *et al*., 2015). Another compelling attribute of the ZPD is that in contrast to traditional tests and measures that only indicate the level of development already attained, the ZPD is forward-looking through its assertion that what one can do today with assistance is indicative of what one will be able to do independently in the future (Lantolf *et al*., 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). I find this assertion relevant to my study as I try to ascertain how students' performance in academic literacy is dependent on how the students had learnt from the home and school, and that what the students had learnt from the home and school will determine whether they are prepared for academic literacy, with prerequisite literacy competencies. It is in the nature of the students' interaction with their parents and the knowledge they acquired from their teachers through their teaching methods in various school environments that the current literacy practices of ESL first year UoT students are to be understood.

Lack of elaboration on the concept of the ZPD has been cited as a major drawback to the ZPD (Verenikina, 2008). Pathan, Memon, Memon, Khoso and Bux (2018) cite Lambert and Clyde (2000) who critiqued the ZPD by stating that Vygotsky presented a restricted view of a learning process as he reduces the role of the learner to passivity and dependency upon the adult. However, Pathan *et al*. (2018) dispel the argument by Lambert and Clyde (2000) on the grounds of their inability to consider the application of ZPD in language learning. In addition,

Lambert and Clyde (2000) failed to provide findings in support of their stance with regard to the limitations of the ZPD (Pathan *et al*., 2018).

2.2.3 Scaffolding

The concept of scaffolding originates from cognitive psychology and language research (Donato, 1994, Turuk, 2008). This concept presupposes that through speech and supportive measures, a knowledgeable person is able to contribute towards development of the novice's (student's) skills and advancement of such skills to a higher level of competence (Turuk, 2008). Seen differently, the educational context sees scaffolding as a structured instructional tool whereby the teacher remodels the intended learning task then progressively shifts the responsibility to the students, yielding educational benefits. These benefits include the following: provision of clear direction for students with regard to a particular task at hand, clarity of the purpose of a specific task, provision of assessment in order to clarify and measure the expectations, the reduction of uncertainties and delivery of efficiency amongst others (Turuk, 2008). In the process of assisting and guiding a learner towards task-based autonomy, scaffolding sees the expert in constant revision and upgrading of the scaffolding to be on par with the emerging learner's capacities, with the hope to finally dismantle the scaffold as the learner demonstrates independence in problem solving (Turuk, 2008). In a second language classroom, collaborative work amongst language learners can afford learners the same opportunities for scaffolded assistance as in teacher-learner relationships on a daily basis (Turuk, 2008; Donato, 1994).

However, scaffolding has its share of challenges. Diverse interpretations due to lack of clear instruction on the application of scaffolding may compromise successful teaching (Verenikina, 2008). The application of the ZPD in practice therefore becomes problematic as Vygotsky failed to provide details about the effective use of ZPD in classrooms (Shayer, 2002; Pathan *et al*., 2018). Additionally, when taken out of theoretical context, scaffolding loses the richness of the original meaning implied by sociocultural theory and invalidates the idea of teaching as co-construction of knowledge within student-centred activities, as advocated by Vygotsky (Verenikina, 2008). Another criticism associated with scaffolding is that it promotes a one-sided relationship between a student and a teachers as opposed to a joint venture between a student and a teacher in order for a learner to gain linguistic competencies (Verenikina, 2008).

The benefits of sociocultural theory in an English Second Language classroom outweigh the challenges, thus making this theory appropriate for the current study. The major strength of the ZPD is that it sees students as active participants in their learning in order to become self-directed learners. The teacher-learner collaboration at the core of ZPD allows for co-construction of knowledge and the transfer of knowledge from the teacher to the learner, allowing a learner to be actively involved in acquiring knowledge and ultimately empowered to becoming self-regulated learner (Verenikina, 2008). Learners are able to assist one another during language learning in focused activities under the guidance of a teacher who provides support and expertise (Verenikina, 2008). In addition, sociocultural theory presents a positive view where a learner is able to learn a language through the mediation tools familiar to the learner in order to promote his or her potential level (Verenikina, 2008). Putting a spotlight on the active position of the learner is a necessity in becoming a self-reliant learner (Pathan *et al.*, 2018).

Pathan *et al.* (2018) cites another positive about sociocultural theory as the great deal of research conducted by Ellis (2000) suggests that Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, ZPD, mediation, scaffolding and internalisation have been reviewed, researched and proven beneficial in second language acquisition. This proven success of the sociocultural theory emanates from the integration of learners' social and cultural artefacts which is paramount to children's cognitive development, as well as their potential performance (Pathan *et al.*, 2018). Sociocultural theory resonates with my study as I seek to explore literacy practices of the ESL first year students at the UoT. In understanding the students' literacies, I argue that ZPD, mediation, scaffolding and internalisation within their environments could have an influence on their early literacy experiences and consequently their academic literacy practices.

2.3 Literature Review

2.3.1 South African schooling context

Some South African learners, like in other countries where a foreign language such as English is a medium of instruction in schools, encounter literacy challenges that have a negative impact on their school performance. South African students' literacy practices are rooted within the context of education in South Africa that still bears the mark of the apartheid regime. The legacy of apartheid[1] laws are still evident in post-apartheid South African education even

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[1] Apartheid refers an era in South African politics that was characterised by racial laws that promoted white supremacy over all others (Gardiner, 2008).

though there have been attempts to redress the issue (Bloch, 2009). The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of South Africa has a role to play with regard to some ESL school learners' and consequently university students' literacy practices.

The LiEP (DoE, 9 May, 1997) had just intentions such as to acknowledge the right of all learners to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions. The LiEP further sought, where reasonably practicable, to promote and develop all 11 official languages. All language subjects were to receive equitable time and resource allocation and vernacular instruction for critical literacy development (DoE, 2011). Learners from Grade 1 to Grade 4 were therefore to receive instruction in their mother tongue, a practice still prevalent in South Africa's Department of Education (DoE, 2003; DoE, 2006; DoE, 2011).

The LiEP (DoE, 9 May, 1997) remains ideal in trying to achieve the following human rights objectives: every child should have the right to identify positively with his/her original home language(s) and have his/her identification accepted and respected by others; every child should have the right to learn in her or his mother tongue(s) fully; every child should have the right to choose when he/she wants to use his/her home language(s) in all official situations.

What becomes a challenge with the above stipulations is that the gap between the ideal language policy and implementation still exists (Rose, 2004), as mother tongue education to all has not been implemented, thus encouraging teachers to code switch with the hope of assisting learners comprehend and carry out instruction. Code switching refers to the alternation between learners' home language and another language in order to make complex concepts more understandable to learners (Rollnick, 2000; Kapp; 2012). This code switching, prevalent in mostly black schools (Rollnick, 2000; Kapp; 2012), may have a negative impact on some ESL learners as they become dependent on their home language, as is sometimes evident at universities (Behrens, Johnson, Allard & Caroli, 2016).

South Africa has 11 official languages and the problems associated with this have an impact on academic development. However, as learners progress to secondary education and ultimately higher education, the medium of instruction is either English or Afrikaans, making the medium of instruction a second language to many students (Alexander, 2004). Banda (2009) asserts that the use of English as a medium of instruction in South African schools, presents a challenge to learning and teaching at university.

The correlation between education, wealth and social class means that, although South Africa is now a democratic country, the schools that were attended by whites during apartheid are today usually better equipped, which is a legacy of the apartheid era. These schools often have teachers who are more effective, have greater opportunities and are still more functional than those that served and continue to serve blacks (Spaull, 2013). Some of the inherited scars left by the apartheid era include the overcrowded nature of many township[2] and rural[3] schools with poor facilities inhibiting teaching and learning, yet schools play a critical role in developing students' reading and writing skills. If students' reading and writing skills are not addressed adequately at school level, the higher education sector will always be flooded with students who are academically under-prepared (Spaull, 2013).

According to Kapp (2012), other factors contributing to poor ESL acquisition and academic achievement in township schools and rural areas are: lack of access to newspapers, magazines, TV and radio; lack of opportunity to hear or to speak English; lack of English reading material at home and at school, as well as poor language teaching by teachers whose own English proficiency is limited. Pretorius (2002) argues that poor matriculation pass rates in South Africa suggest a reading-to-learn barrier to academic performance – students at school and in higher education institutions are expected to access information from print independently, to construct meaning and to reconstruct new knowledge. The reading-to-learn barrier in schools results in poorly equipped students entering higher education institutions.

Dukhan, Cameron and Bremer, (2016) note that in 1994, educational opportunities were opened to previously disadvantaged populations, which resulted in increasing numbers of black students gaining entry into universities. It is the nature of literary practices expected by the academic disciplines that determines failure or success of students. McKenna (2010) asserts that the real key to whether a student will pass or fail relates to the school literacy practices and home environments and the extent to which these have commonalities with the literacy practices at the university. Lecturers often label students as underprepared, and compound

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[2] Township schools in the South African context refers to those schools found in townships-areas that were previously demarcated for African people outside the cities (Gardiner, 2008).
[3] Rural areas in the South African context refers to underdeveloped areas that resulted from the racial policy of apartheid that sought to segregate all African people from white people thereby locating African people away from urban areas (Gardiner, 2008). Schools in rural areas are usually underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure and often have underqualified teachers (Gardiner, 2008).

issues, such as financial constraints and concerns make their studying difficult (McKenna, 2010). The assertions regarding the impact of students' environment and experiences on their academic literacy resonate with sociocultural theory and this study which considers ESL first year UoT students' early literacy experiences from the home and school and their influence on students' current academic literacy practices.

Research has revealed that the school and academic institutions need to acknowledge, appreciate and embrace varied literacies that ESL learners bring with them from the home environment to English-medium educational institutions (Kajee, 2011; Gutiérrez, 2008). This revelation stems from an understanding of the societal role rooted in society-specific norms, values and beliefs, which in turn inform learners' interaction, interpretation and comprehension of literacy practices in a formal school setting (Kajee, 2011; Gutiérrez, 2008) – such ideas are advocated by Vygotsky (1978) in his discussions regarding language learning.

2.3.2 Literacy

This study explores literacy practices of ESL first year students at a UoT. Literacy is "the ability and willingness to use reading and writing to construct meaning from the printed text, in ways which meet the requirements of a particular social context" (Au, 1993, p. 20). Literacy is "the broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking and doing about reading and writing in cultural contexts" (Street, 2003, p. 79). Rose (2005) states that literacy refers to the learners' ability to comprehend and carry out instructions using the expected discourse conventions per learners' grade, genre and discipline, under the teachers' guidance. These definitions by Au (1993), Street (2003) and Rose (2004) see reading and writing as crucial components of literacy (Chokwe, 2011). Banda (2003, p. 6) points out that "schooled literacy" should be perceived in terms of its relationship to socioeconomic, historical and cultural factors, as well as to community dialogues and not merely in terms of the discipline of education. In other words, the formal literacy practices that learners receive from the school are influenced by the learners' home literacy practices, as well as socioeconomic factors, which is in line with the sociocultural theory wherein early literacy practices from the home, environment and school influence students' school literacy. However, the definition of literacy has changed over the years as it does not only limit learning within the classroom perimeters but it encompasses what children can learn from their environment through varied artefacts, peers, parents and caregivers amongst others (Sailors, Martinez, Treviño, Stortz, Davis, Jones

& Van Cura Monaco, 2018). Even though the basic definition of literacy involves reading and writing, understanding literacy as a social practice establishes a literate individual who comprehends the text beyond a practice of reading and writing but also recognises the interrelatedness between reading and writing as well as the environmental background (Godin, 2017). Furthermore, literacy is constantly being redefined to incorporate political, social, economic and religious relevance of a particular society in order to strike a balance between the complex dynamic societies and individual empowerment in democratic societies seeking to represent various societal groups (Ntiri, 2009; Godin, 2017). In order for students to have authority over their own literacy skills and identities, literacy practices should be free from restrictions that manifest through difficulties to make sense and consequently assimilate information, giving rise to students feeling marginalised (Godin, 2017). Failure to define literacy in a society-orientated context, results in students altering their identities and understanding of their own socioeconomic, socio-political and cultural realities (Godin, 2017).

2.3.2.1 Home Literacy Environment (HLE)

Early literacy has been defined as what children are exposed to in the home and their environment regarding reading and writing before they formally learn to read and write (Wagner, Torgesen, & Rashotte, 1994; Wagner Torgesen, & Rashotte, 1997). This literacy exposure, along with children's different levels of preparedness to benefit from formal learning experiences often translate into consequential differences in reading and other areas of academic accomplishments when children start school (Wagner *et al*., 1994; Wagner *et al*., 1997). Antilla (2013) notes that research on early childhood education traces the roots of literacy development from early literacy which begins when the child is very young, before going to school through the understanding of the types and meanings of print. The child's overall literacy development and readiness for school is shaped by the child's parents who become the first teachers, thus playing a fundamental role as their involvement determines the children's preparedness to formal instruction and subsequently influence the literary success throughout their entire secondary and tertiary education and their adulthood (Antilla, 2013); this idea is in line with sociocultural theory as it sees learners' parents and the environment as instrumental in learners' early literacy development (Rose 2004; Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf *et al*., 2015). Additionally, sociocultural theory operates from the premise that learners' environment and the home have an influence on learners' preparedness and ability to acquire

new knowledge from the school, as mediated by the teachers (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf *et al*., 2015).

Since the home is an environment wherein children get initial and subsequent exposure to literacy, the home environment is also known as Home Literacy Environment (HLE) (Lantolf *et al*., 2015). The HLE is a multi-faceted concept which encompasses various activities pertaining to how parents impart language and literacy-related skills to their children (Lantolf *et al*., 2015); these activities include but are not limited to: practical uses of literacy, verbal references to literacy, library use, parental encouragement and value of reading, parental teaching of literacy skills, parental modelling of literacy behaviours, and parental attitudes toward education (Yeung & King, 2016).

The Home Literacy Model proposed by Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002), classifies various HLE activities into informal literacy experiences and formal literacy instruction (Yeung & King, 2016). Informal home literacy activities refer to those activities which involve ordinary and unintentional exposure to newspapers, magazines and children's books, amongst others, for the purposes of shared reading (Puglisi, Hulme, Hamilton & Snowling 2017; Antilla, 2013; Borgonovi, 2011). Shared reading in the home refers to exposure to print material such as books, magazines, newspapers and more which takes place as a parent reads aloud to the child (Antilla, 2013). Additionally, dialogue can be used by parents to teach their children literacy skills as they interact with them (Borgonovi, 2011). Fun literacy games and songs are an integral part of informal home literacy activities (Borgonovi, 2011). Such views are in line with sociocultural theory as the type of print and interaction that children get exposed to in the home, are dependent on the choices of the children's parents (Vygotsky, 1978; Antilla, 2013; Lantolf *et al*., 2015). Additionally, Chu and Wu (2010) posit that HLE is crucial in promoting young children's literacy development as it allows children opportunities to become familiar with literacy resources. Formal literacy activities in the home include direct literacy instruction (Puglisi *et al*., 2017) which include writing, recognition and reading of words (Puglisi *et al*., 2017).

Parents also play a crucial role in children's literacies as they influence children's reading attitude and consequently children's reading skills thereby encouraging them to read as they grow, yielding positive self-esteem where reading is concerned (Rena, Abedalaziz & Leng, 2013). A study conducted by Lantolf *et al*., (2015) sought to establish the children's readiness

to receive formal instruction. When parents, educators and researchers were questioned about the root of children's initial difference in preparedness to benefit from formal learning experiences, the most commonly given answer was that the HLE played a crucial role, as the parents were regarded as instrumental in shaping the their children's preparedness to receive formal instruction. For instance, the nature of activities parents exposed their children to would either prepare or underprepare them for preschool (Lantolf *et al*., 2015). This belief that HLE is instrumental to the children's early literacy development has led to the deduction that exposing children to a home environment rich in literacy activities is beneficial to their literacy and language development (Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002). These literacy activities are the start of children's early literacy practices. What then occurs if a child is not exposed to a rich HLE? What occurs if parents cannot provide such an environment? Is a child disadvantaged even before entering school? Such questions, and others, shaped this study.

2.3.2.1.1 The Relationship between Socioeconomic Status and HLE

Research has identified some variations in home environments that have effects on the development of children's literacy skills (Chu & Wu, 2010). The variations in home environments which include "parents' level of education, parents' own literacy habits, and family income" may have a bearing on the differences in children's school literacy preparation (Chu & Wu, 2010, p, 1). Research has found that significant correlations between the frequency of shared picture book reading in the home and preschool language abilities of preschool children (Chu & Wu, 2010; Rose, 2004). Early psychological studies by Feitelson and Goldstein (1986) and Harris and Smith (1987) have identified various reasons why parents are unable to develop literacy practices in the home. One of the reasons the studies of Feitelson and Goldstein, (1986) and Harris and Smith (1987) have established is that children from low income families are read to less frequently than children from higher socioeconomic groups.

A study conducted in the United States by Antilla (2013) sought to establish reasons behind the lack of preparedness to begin nursery school, demonstrated by a large number of children. Children's lack of exposure to print, due to socioeconomic status in the home was identified as a catalyst to children's unpreparedness to enter nursery (Antilla, 2013). Research shows that, in the United States of America, children's' socioeconomic statuses play an important role in their preparedness to receive formal teaching (Antilla, 2013; Dogged and Wat, 2010; West, Denton and Germino-Hausken, 2000). The findings of the research indicated that 30% of children from low income families are unfamiliar with print until nursery, 17% of children

from middle income households and 8% of children from high income households were not familiar with print (Antilla, 2013). Furthermore, McKenna (2004) is of the view that people's literacy practices are historically constructed, and cites Wells (1986) and Heath (1983) who posit that the future of students' literacy practices is determined by their early literacy events. For instance, a child from a reading rich household, with exposure to various texts, is most likely to use reading skills that are similar to those expected at school, as texts would normally have similar structure and style and such a child would require less scaffolding (McKenna 2004).

In an Australian study, Rose (2004) notes individual differences in literacy practices within low-income families that may affect children's language and achievement outcomes. Parent-child reading is not practiced in rural areas where the indigenous people of Australia live. Parent-child reading before school is the first stage in a curriculum of reading skills that determines the content and processes of teaching and learning in each stage of schooling (Rose, 2004). There is an existing relationship between early exposure to literacy in the home and children's performance during their later literacy practices in the school. Rose asserts that one thousand hours of reading that the children are exposed to before formal school, due to access to reading material from the home, puts those children at a language advantage compared to those children who are to learn literacy practices for the first time at school.

Rose (2004) illustrates the language interaction between an 18 months old child and a mother, during parent-reading. This interaction takes form of a mother giving basic instructions to the child such as finding a page with a particular picture and positive affirmations, while reading. Since basic literacy entails the ability to read and write, a parent who is unable to read and write is not in a position to read stories to her or his children, which already puts a child at a disadvantage. Exposing children to book reading prior to formal schooling is beneficial for children's literacy development as it creates willingness to read within the child, marking the beginning of an adventurous journey of reading and writing (Lawson, 2012; Antilla, 2013).

However, Chu and Wu (2010) cite Auerback (1989), Ortiz, (2004) and Wearmouth, (2004) who refute the assumption of an existing relationship between the home environments of poor (or undereducated) families and the children's decreased opportunities to acquire essential language skills. Through their previous studies, Auerback (1989), Ortiz, (2004) and Wearmouth, (2004) have revealed that some poor families in the United States valued literacy

therefore provided rich literacy activities for their children at home. It becomes important to ascertain how students in South Africa, from varying socioeconomic contexts, understand their literacy activities in the home.

2.3.2.2 School literacy

2.3.2.2.1 Primary school literacy

School literacy is characterised by low school achievement in sub-Saharan Africa as education is conducted through a European language, a second language to many learners (Clegg & Afitska, 2011). Lack of fluency and under-qualification of teachers to teach a European language and learners' lack of fluency in a European language are common challenges within the education departments in sub-Saharan Africa (Clegg & Afitska, 2011). Thus, code switching, the practice of alternating words between two or more languages or variations of language in conversation (Samarakoon, 2017), and code mixing, the practice of alternating of phrases or sentences from two or more languages during the conversation (Samarakoon, 2017) are common practices across sub-Saharan classrooms as teachers seek to assist learners with comprehension (Clegg & Afitska, 2011). Learners usually converse in both the medium of instruction and their mother tongue during teaching and learning (Clegg & Afitska, 2011). While code switching is condemned by education authorities in some African schools, it is used by some teachers and students nevertheless (Clegg & Afitska, 2011), and authorities in some countries even plan for and support bilingual education (Clegg & Afitska, 2011).

Two international studies have reported that South African learners are ranked amongst the lowest in international standards in reading, and that the medium of instruction (English), which is the language of assessment at school, most likely contributes to the students' poor academic performance, as it is a second language to most learners (Howie, Van Staden, Tshele, Dowse & Zimmerman, 2011; Dukhan *et al*., 2016). The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is an international study of reading literacy conducted every five years. In 2006, 40 countries participated, including South Africa. Approximately 30,000 Grade 4 and 5 learners were assessed and the following findings were reported: South Africa's Grade 4 and 5 learners achieved the lowest mean scores in English compared to the other participating countries (Howie, 2011 *et al*.,). Learners in Grades 4-5 have barely mastered reading

comprehension skills in the mother tongue, let alone the ESL, thus depicting how early literacy practices of ESL learners are to influence their literacy practices in the later years (Pretorius, 2002). It is of necessity that students learn to convey a cohesive representation of their texts (Pretorius, 2006), thus the focus should lie in the development of language proficiency (Kapp, 2012) and reading ability (Dukhan *et al.*, 2016).

A study conducted by Fleisch (2008) sought to establish literacy practices of South African primary school learners. Shifting from mother-tongue instruction in reading, writing and numeracy in the first two to three years of schooling to second language in Grade 4, where the learner is expected to be proficient in reading across the curriculum, is problematic (Fleisch, 2008). The participants in Fleisch's (2008) study had a limited vocabulary of about 500 words and could read only simple three to seven word sentences in the present tense (Fleisch, 2008).

A study conducted by van Staden and Howie (2012) sought to investigate whether reading and reading-related skills of ESL could have substantial improvement following evidence-based direct instruction and reading scaffolding techniques to enhance reading comprehension. The study had a sample of 288 ESL learners from 24 primary schools in the Free State Province, South Africa. The study found that most South African Grade 5 learners demonstrated an inability to read English text at the expected or required level, despite some interventions by the South African DoE through the school curriculum. The LiEP that embraces the 11 official languages in primary school literacy whereby learners receive instruction in their mother tongue from grade 1 to 4 but are expected to read and receive instruction in a second language from grade 5 thus presents a challenge in facilitating second language literacy acquisition, and makes developing literacy in the second language a challenging task (van Staden & Howie, 2012).

Factors contributing to poor reading and spelling outcomes in ESL learners include: lack of qualified educators, over-crowded classrooms and a background of poverty (Nel and Müller, 2010). Poor reading and spelling skills lead to lower overall academic performance as learners who experience early literacy difficulty often continue to experience failure in later grades and later in life (Nel and Müller, 2010). Poor reading and spelling skills result in many ESL learners being labelled as learners with learning disabilities and placed in special education services (Nel & Müller, 2010). Thus, those who acquire early literacy skills have the tools to grow tremendously in their knowledge and skills while those who fail to develop early literacy skills

fall further behind (Soares De Sousa, Greenop & Fry, 2010), and yet poor early literacy skills might be dependent on an individual's reading and spelling proficiency in his/her first language, and the degree of overlap in the oral and written characteristics of home and an acquired second language (Soares De Sousa *et al.*, 2010).

Reading ability is based on interpreting and comprehending texts, and the focus on decoding takes place during primary schooling (Pretorius, 2002). The pre-requisites for decoding have not always been taught at primary school level and this is not a skill that is easily acquired independently (Dukhan *et al.*, 2016). However, as learners advance through their schooling it is usually presumed that they will independently learn to deconstruct and make meaning of texts (Pretorius, 2002). To improve academic performance, there should therefore be adequate exposure to written texts at primary school (Kruidenier, 2002).

2.3.2.2.2 Secondary school literacy

A study conducted by Fakeye and Ogunsiji (2009) sought to establish a link between the poor performance of Nigerian secondary school learners during their public examination across disciplines and their English language proficiency. Inability to fully grasp the content taught in English to both ESL and English first language (EFL) students was connected to their poor English language proficiency (Fakeye & Ogunsiji 2009). The curriculum where teachers over-rely on a single textbook, had encouraged laziness in teachers of ESL learners who did not give learners an opportunity to read but made them repeat and imitate what the teacher had said (Amuseghan, 2007). Learners not communicating in English during lessons, and outside the school perimeters tended not to have three of four basic literacy skills namely: reading, speaking and subsequently writing, yielding poor examination performance across disciplines (Fakeye, & Ogunsiji 2009; Amuseghan, 2007).

In Lesotho, large classes where most students are Sotho speaking have also seen secondary education encountering English language literacy problems (Ekanjume-Ilongo, 2015). English, although a second language for many learners in Lesotho, is the medium of instruction in public schools (Ekanjume-Ilongo, 2015). Learners in the classroom and outside the classroom prefer to communicate in Sotho, an activity that puts a strain on their English verbal, reading, listening and writing skills both at school and subsequently at higher learning institutions (Ekanjume-Ilongo, 2015). Similarly, Chokwe (2011), reports that South African ESL learners seldom use English in their daily lives and overcrowded classrooms and poor facilities dominate their

learning and teaching environments; Chokwe (2011) projects that this situation will remain in the schooling context for the vast majority of South Africans for the foreseeable future.

Lexical and grammatical errors manifesting in essay writing by senior high school learners in Ghana was found in a qualitative study where three senior high schools in the Central Region of Ghana were under study (Owu-Ewie, & Williams, 2017). The following grammatical errors were noted: concord, tense, singular-plural, preposition, article and conjunction. Additionally, lexical errors were categorised into homophone-induced errors and semantic lexical errors. A study by Kajee (2011) that sought to examine how home and community literacies of immigrants intersected school literacies in South Africa, revealed that even though immigrant learners have rich literacy skills from their home environment rooted in their own native language(s), most of the schools displayed favouritism to dominant groups, as opposed to the minority groups, resulting in issues of power and status attached to the dominant language such as English, thus yielding a poor reception of English language literacies and consequently performance by some immigrant students at the institutions of higher learning (Kajee, 2011).

It becomes clear that ESL learners face similar or related challenges in secondary education. These literacy challenges emanate from the fact that learning in a second or foreign language such as English, demands English language proficiency that some ESL learners do not possess. Some ESL teachers who are not native speakers of English have encountered challenges in imparting literacy competencies such as reading, speaking and writing, due to under-qualification and incompetence in English amongst others (Chokwe, 2011), resulting in poor overall performance of learners during their schooling years and subsequently in higher education (Chokwe, 2011). Pretorius and Machet (2004, p. 58) refer to the "paradox of the primary school professional", referring to teachers of literacy who are themselves unskilled and do not read due to a strong oral culture and lack of reading materials. As home literacy has an influence on learners' school literacy, so too does the school literacy influence academic literacy (Rose 2004).

Gutiérrez (2008) argues that in order for the schooling system to facilitate and achieve literacy empowerment to the youth, a paradigm shift needs to take place, where educational institutions cease to dissociate school literacy from learners' environmental or social literacies. It is through the understanding and recognition of a third space, a sociocritical literacy, that ESL learners can assimilate, the school literacies (Gutiérrez, 2008). The third space is deemed

as a particular kind of ZPD that offers detailed and critical insight into each individual learners' ability to acquire and learn a second language beyond the classroom interaction between the learner and the teacher; it includes the interaction of the learner with the teacher, peers and environment, as espoused by sociocultural theory (Gutiérrez, 2008). Sociocritical literacy understands learners' literacy practices in terms of the historical, political, socioeconomic, schooling system and other environmental factors as playing a role, particularly on how ESL learners will make meaning and interact with the language at school (Gutiérrez, 2008). Sociocritical literacy therefore presupposes that since the home and the institutional literacies are historical, both literacies can be powerful tools geared toward critical social thought (Gutiérrez, 2008).

Sailors *et al*. (2018) argue for a new definition of literacy that sees beyond the conventional meaning of the ability to read and write. This new definition considers variations to interpretations of information rooted in people's own cultural, linguistic and social preferences. For instance, exposure to literacy can take the form of silent reading through observation of someone's behaviour or routine, which is referred to as the use of sociospacial landscape in meaning making or expanding the landscape of literacy as children tend to use their metaphors, temporality, imagery and symbolism to better interpret and formulate text (Sailors *et al*., 2018). Since learners tend to interpret school literacies with their daily experiences, the curriculum needs to speak to learners' daily or historical issues. A western or English-orientated curriculum may therefore not be ideal for learners with no English orientation from the home.

2.3.3 Academic Literacy

What becomes clear in many definitions of academic literacy is that it is more than reading and writing. Academic literacy refers to the knowledge of how to speak and act within a particular discourse and the reading and writing that occur within the discipline, as tools through which to facilitate learning (van Schalkwyk, Bitzer, & van der Walt, 2010). Academic literacy is grounded in reading and writing (Boakye, Sommerville, & Debusho 2014), yet, it is more than reading and writing as each genre of written text has its own rules and requirements for success (Papashane & Hlalele, 2014). I subscribe to all the above definitions of academic literacy, as they acknowledge that academic literacy is more than reading and writing. Additionally, academic literacy includes the contextual and cultural aspects of disciplines (Chokwe, 2011). Furthermore, academic literacy advocates for proficiency in reading and writing academic texts aimed at contributing to the on-going discussions in an academic field,

taking into account students' identities, contexts and cultures which they bring to the academic process (Chokwe, 2011). Moreover, academic literacy constitutes the standards, ethics and values of higher educational institutions displayed in particular discipline practices that students are expected to adhere to (McKenna, 2004).

As noted earlier, there is a relationship between what students learn in secondary school and their academic literacies, as what students learn in school either prepares or under-prepares them for university studies (Chokwe, 2011; Cliff & Hanslo 2009); hence, students from under-resourced school backgrounds usually manifest poor academic performance which is most likely to continue in higher education (Cliff & Hanslo (2009; Lea & Street 2006). van Schalkwyk, *et al*. (2009) argue that since reading and writing play a fundamental role in students' learning and their achievement during the first year at university, it is therefore vital that students attain these skills in order that they succeed, as these skills will influence their academic literacy practices. According to Papashane and Hlalele (2014), when former secondary learners come to tertiary institutions, they bring with them literacy practices that may or may not be considered appropriate to tertiary institutions. While some students acquire academic literacy by mastering the usage of appropriate language for the relevant discipline, this may not always be the case, particularly for those students who are underprepared for higher education studies (van Schalkwyk *et al*., 2010).

The legacy of apartheid, together with western literacy practices in South African institutions of higher learning have disadvantaged some students both linguistically and culturally, robbing them of easy access to discipline-specific linguistic jargon and cultural practices of the academic communities (McKenna, 2004). New literacy studies understand the role of educational institutions as being to reconcile learners' existing literacy practices with the new expected literacies, thereby deeming language and literacy as social entities rather than only technical competencies to be learnt in formal education (Kajee, 2011). McKenna (2004, p. 1) argues that academic literacy, comprising discipline specific norms and values of higher education that students are expected to master without any explicit instruction or evaluation as "ways of being", should realise that students have their own ways of being rooted in their identities or cultures. It is in the knowledge and recognition of students' identities that higher education institutions impart the new literacies to students (McKenna, 2004). McKenna (2004) argues for more studies aimed at understanding the relationship between ESL learners' academic literacy practices and their social structures, as the two are intertwined. Since some

ESL students in English-medium institutions are unable to freely engage with their environment which includes their texts, lecturers and fellow students in their vernacular language (which is linked to identity), the impression created is that institutions value certain identities over the others (McKenna, 2004).

2.3.3.1 Academic writing

Academic writing is an essential creative skill that all university students need in order to ensure academic success. This skill requires a complete, active engagement with facts and principles of a particular discipline (Singh, 2015). The demonstration of proficiency of disciplinary skills such as thinking, interpretation and presentation through evaluation is crucial to academic writing (Irvin, 2010). Since academic writing is discipline-orientated, knowledge of what each lecturer expects equals good writing. Knowledge of research skills such as searching for more in-depth information from the library and online databases with scholarly articles is an integral part of academic writing. Furthermore, keeping track of sources or references is an essential component of academic writing. Academic writing requires good analysis to sustain an argument, where clear claims are made, supported with good rationale and presented in the form of various texts such as a thesis and essays, amongst others. Thus, written evidence should display a writer's persistence, open-mindedness and objectivity. However, most first year university students encounter problems in displaying a well-argued piece of writing (Irvin, 2010).

Hyland (2007) points out that as a form of thinking, students' ability in sustaining arguments and synthesising ideas to write in English for academic purposes is crucial for academic success. Likewise, McKenna (2010), in a study conducted at a UoT in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, posits that mastering the conventions of academic literacy remains a crucial factor for success within higher education. However, academic writing at tertiary level still poses challenges, particularly for students who are not native speakers of English, as these students often encounter difficulties with regard to grammar, language and language rules (McKenna, 2010).

While knowledge of academic English is crucial for students to succeed at university (Behrens *et al*., 2016), a study within the Malaysian university, indicated that the challenges associated with academic literacy are faced by ESL students globally (Singh, 2015). These challenges include a lack of academic writing competencies and inability to comprehend and

carry out instruction at an academic level, amongst others, thus yielding poor academic performance (Singh, 2015). It is important to note that the medium of instruction within the UoT in which this study is conducted is English, a second language of the participants and the majority of students.

Research conducted in a UoT in Kuala Lumpur has proven that writing in a second language is not an easy task for students, yet it is necessary that they attain this skill in order to succeed at university (Tom, Morni, Metom, & Joe, 2013). One of the findings was that ESL students differ from native English speakers in their linguistic, contextual and oral presentations, and that writing is less demanding for First Language students as writers are familiar with the language structure and are proficient in the language. Furthermore, compared to EFL students, ESL students are dependent on their teachers with regard to information provision and guidance to assist them in their writing (Tom *et al*., 2013); this factor could pose a challenge for ESL first year university students' academic writing, especially when lecturers assume that students have the requisite literacies and are able to work independently.

The difficulty in writing by ESL students stems from various grammatical demands such as sentence construction and vocabulary (Behrens *et al*., 2016; Tom *et al*., 2013), often resulting in ESL students' inability to cope in the ways that an English native speaker could (Tom *et al*., 2013). Academic writing requires broad, active engagement with the specifics and philosophies of a particular discipline (Rose, 2005) and a very specific type of writing. In addition, the academic writing process involves connection between writing well and the ability to think well. Students' ability in cohesion and coherence in writing in English for academic purposes is vital for academic success (Singh, 2015).

Banda (2009) attributes the problem of poor academic writing to students having no other option but to study in English, which is their second, third or fourth language. He further argues that students from African-language speaking homes are at a disadvantage and will continue to seek strategies to mediate ESL academic writing. This view is also shared by van Rensberg and Lamberti, (2004) who contend that students who have had poor schooling and study in a language other than their mother tongue are at a disadvantage academically. Furthermore, Jacobs (2005) argues that students who are taught in a second language are denied immediate access to content. This assertion by Banda (2009) resonates with my study as I seek to show a link between students' school literacies and their university literacies.

A study conducted by Ngwenya (2010) at North West-University in South Africa at Mafikeng, which looked at English language demands on first year ESL legal students revealed that, along with reading challenges that participants encountered, their academic writing displayed the following weaknesses: grammar, synthesis of information from different texts, consistency and coherence; such weaknesses showed that they lacked Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Ngwenya, 2010). CALP refers to formal academic learning, which includes listening, speaking, reading and writing about subject area reading material. This level of proficiency in a language is a necessity for students at an educational institution (Haynes, 2007). The same students in the study did have Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), which are basic language skills needed in normal day today social interactions situations (Ngwenya, 2010). These skills include the ability to have a basic understanding of a language, mainly orally (Haynes, 2007). Students attributed their literacy deficiencies to the Western-orientated nature of their curriculum, restricting their ability to identify with it and the burden posed by studying at an English-medium university when their home language is Setswana (Ngwenya, 2010). When lecturers were asked if they did not intend teaching English literacy within the legal discipline, they cited their concern with students' literacies but pointed out that they were not qualified language lecturers (Ngwenya, 2010).

A study conducted by Behrens *et al*. (2016) sought to uncover students and lecturers' expectations about academic writing in higher education. Their study revealed that even though mastering academic English is vital to the students' success at universities, research indicates that lecturers and tutors themselves lack clarity on what academic English is (Behrens *et al*., 2016). Lack of proper linguistic training by lecturers contributes to their inability to define academic English to students (Behrens *et al*., 2016; Hyland, 2007). In agreement, Chokwe (2011), cites staff under-preparedness as an important factor affecting ESL first year students' literacy practices. The challenge of lecturers' under-preparedness is exacerbated by the fact that the academic staff fail to explicitly agree amongst themselves on what constitutes academic English (Behrens *et al*., 2016).

Lecturers and tutors need to consider the possibility of their own under-preparedness to address the specific writing problems of the diverse students whom they are required to teach each year in the first year classroom (Niven, 2005). In order to address academic writing difficulties, lecturers or tutors should also see themselves as active participants in the process, by ensuring that they are fully equipped and trained to help students improve their academic

writing skills. A particular concern is that lecturers and tutors tend to perceive academic writing as a school problem or an external and additional task that is not part of their teaching duties. Some lecturers seem to think that students' writing difficulties should not be addressed by lecturers, as teaching undergraduate students to write in English is not the lecturers' job. Failure by students to adjust to university language will result in students failing and the assumption by lecturers is that students who get admitted at a university possess prerequisite literacy competencies, which is not the case with some students (Niven, 2005).

Poor student writing cannot only be attributed to the poor schooling system but also to universities, where academic staff should take responsibility and also contribute in addressing students' academic writing problems (Chokwe, 2011). Chokwe (2011) declares that although it will be a difficult exercise to embark on, higher education institutions should attempt to correct what the schooling system failed to do (preparing learners for academic literacy), by designing effective writing programmes that will immerse students into contextual academic discourses within their respective disciplines, as well as effective teacher training for lecturers in order to do this. Chokwe (2011) acknowledges that in order to address student writing difficulties, a holistic approach needs to be taken, starting from primary education through to higher education where writing intensively becomes an integral part of the learning outcomes. Academic staff should also get themselves involved in teaching and transferring academic writing skills to students because in some instances, specific discipline-related writing problems will require subject-specific interventions which language specialists do not have (Chokwe, 2011). While I agree with Chokwe (2011) that writing requires specific subject-related intervention, I am aware of feasibility factors due to inadequately qualified personnel and time constraints.

Papashane and Hlalele (2014), maintain that the ultimate aim of academic literacy exercises for students is usually to have them synthesise new information that reflects critical and objective thinking process. Thus, academic literacy practices include writing in clear sentences that are free from spelling and punctuation errors, ability to use ideas from others into their work, structuring an essay, writing introductions and conclusions in an appropriate style, analysing assignment questions, reading of academic texts and reflecting critically on ideas and experiences, amongst others (Papashane & Hlalele 2014). Academic essay writing skills are central to academic literacy at university, as writing plays a major role in students' note taking, essay writing and assessment (Papashane & Hlalele 2014). These written

assessments include essays, responses to case studies and research reports, amongst others. The commonality amongst the written assessments mentioned is that they allow students to demonstrate comprehension of instructions (Papashane & Hlalele, 2014).

Kim (2001), through a study conducted in a South Korean university notes that ESL students often do not have strong enough vocabulary knowledge to paraphrase effectively. For ESL learners, comprehension of reading material in content courses creates a limitation when they have to write summaries, as they tend to engage in extensive direct copying of a text. Additionally, Keck (2006) studied 153 summaries written by EFL and ESL university students. She found that ESL students used significantly more long copied strings of the original text when they were paraphrasing. Similarly, Kim (2009) found that less proficient EFL students engaged in significantly more direct copying, whereas more proficient EFL students made much greater use of moderate revisions (Petric, 2012).Furthermore, Yu (2008) studied English summary writing among 157 Chinese university students studying English as a foreign language and found that students' summarising abilities were significantly related to their reading proficiency levels. Similarly, Baba (2009) studied 68 Japanese university students and found that students' English summarising abilities were related to their reading comprehension skills and their vocabulary knowledge. One of the consequences of limited vocabulary knowledge and comprehension skills, as well as limited practice in related writing tasks, is that English for Academic Purpose (EAP) students at lower proficiency levels commonly plagiarise and copy much more than students at higher proficiency levels.

Studies by Lillis and Scott (2007), Ivanic and Lea (2006), Lea (2004) and Munro (2003), show that student writing poses specific challenges for ESL teaching and learning contexts across the globe, in higher education institutions. According to Lea and Street (1998) in noting the relationship between writing and literacy, in the United Kingdom (UK), reports reveal that literacy standards in schools and higher education institutions are very low and academics often complain that students cannot write properly. Munro (2003) confirms this view and argues that dealing effectively with students' literacy difficulties and, in turn, poor academic writing skills, is a challenge that universities across the world have to contend with.

A more demanding reading/writing task that is commonly assigned in academic settings is one that combines information from two or more texts (Hirvela, 2004). This sort of task can involve, for example, a comparison of information or ideas from multiple texts, a set of text-

based solutions to address a set of text-based problems, a set of texts that identify multiple aspects of an issue, or a set of texts that require the writer to form an argument. The development of writing skills that allow students to use multiple textual resources to synthesise and interpret text information is a typical academic task, which is a difficult writing task to master, even for many English Home Language students (Horning, 2010). In a series of studies, Plakans (2008, 2009, and 2010) examined the synthesis writing of 12 ESL students in US universities. Plakans (2010) found that synthesis writing should be explicitly taught to ESL students.

Research was conducted by Dukhan *et al*. (2016), at a South African university, where 60% of the participants were ESL first year students. The purpose of this study was to establish whether there are any differences in the quality of the note taking construction in English between ESL and EFL students and subsequently, assess whether the difference, if any, affected their grades (Dukhan *et al*., 2016). The result was that English first language students had far better note taking skills compared to ESL students. Contributory factors to poor note taking by ESL students included difficulty with the vocabulary of the discipline. Furthermore, ESL students from black schools who enter a university at which the medium of instruction is English, may lack the required English competency which is essential to their academic success, yielding negative results with regard to their note making skills (Dukhan *et al*., 2016). These findings are in line with sociocultural theory as learners' past literacy events have an impact on learners' current and future events (Rose, 2004).

The quality of note taking by students in class affects the way in which they engage with and revise their notes after class. The note making phase is more closely associated with generative learning than the note taking phase (Kiewra, DuBois, Christian, McShane, Meyerhoffer & Roskelley, 1991). Generative learning refers to the students' creation of links between prior knowledge and new knowledge (Peper & Mayer, 1978; Peper & Mayer, 1986). During note revision, if second-language students spend more effort in understanding the language in which the concepts are taught than on enhancing their depth of understanding, the quality of their notes will be compromised and they will miss generative learning opportunities (Dukhan *et al*., 2016). The lack of generative learning will then impact on the grades that students achieve (Dukhan *et al*., 2016).

2.3.3.2 Reading for academic writing

Academic writing is not only about writing but also about engaging with texts, which requires reading for understanding, and this is critical literacy (Papashane & Hlalele, 2014). Reading underpins the writing process as one reads for a purpose. Reading plays a crucial part in the acquisition and learning of a particular dialogue, per discipline (Kapp & Bangeni, 2005). Reading is therefore the keystone of learning, thus, an essential academic learning activity that students need to engage with (Bharuthram, 2017). There is a strong relationship between academic performance and reading (Bharuthram, 2017; Rose, 2004; Ngwenya, 2010; Irvin, 2010). There is difference between school reading and university reading (Irvin, 2010). Whereas school reading is largely based on the taught content, university reading emanates from the individual student's ability to interact with texts, and it is through the ability to think critically during critical or evaluative reading that the student is able to write well. For critical reading to take place, the reader needs to be able to make inferences, differentiate between facts and opinions, and identify biases and assumptions, and separate fact from opinion (Irvin, 2010).

However, despite the importance of reading for academic excellence, research shows that there is a growing percentage of national and international first year students who enter South African higher education institutions with deficient reading literacy, thus, failing to achieve the expected academic performance from their respective disciplines (Bharuthram, 2017; Ngwenya, 2010). A study that sought to depict a relationship between socio-affective factors and the reading proficiency in South African universities by Boakye *et al.* (2014), was a result of high failure and drop-out rates, yielding lower graduation rates, as students struggle with academic activities (Boakye *et al.*, 2014). Lack of academic reading competence still remains a dominant phenomenon amongst first year ESL students as they make their university entrance underprepared. The inadequate reading capabilities contribute to students' failure in keeping up with the volume of reading required (Boakye *et al.*, 2014).

According to Kapp and Bangeni, (2005), it is through the exploration of subheadings, introduction and conclusion, the use of evidence to substantiate claims, as well as sentence level analysis of the use of parts of speech and citation in the article that readers are able to clarify how writers position themselves within the argument and create logic. The ability of critical language awareness at the sentence level therefore remains a crucial tool for critical

analysis of texts. In addition, the instrumental approach[4] to referencing results in students viewing citation solely as a display of reading or as proof that one has not plagiarised, and not as a process of tracing tradition and establishing authority (Kapp & Bangeni, 2005). Because the expectation is that students would have developed the required level of reading skill at school, lecturers at university do not generally focus on developing reading skills (Kapp, 2012; Carstens, 2011; Wildsmith-Cromarty & Steinke, 2014; Dukhan *et al.*, 2016).

Nel, Dreyer and Klopper (2004) cite Blue (1993), as stating that an adequate display of overall content comprehension characterised by distinguishing main points from supporting detail, skimming, scanning, questioning, looking for assumptions and intentions, analysis and evaluation, amongst others, is crucial for first year university students whilst the reality is usually opposite due to under preparedness. In a study conducted in South Africa by Nel *et al.* (2004) with first-year English for Professional Purposes (EPP) course students, with either Xhosa or Afrikaans as the vernacular and English as a second language, it was found that a key, but often overlooked skill that is essential to academic and professional success is reading ability.

Dukhan *et al.* (2016) cite Durkin, (1993, p, 21) who refers to reading comprehension as the "essence of reading" because reading interactions yield comprehension. Reading comprehension can be described as understanding a text that is read, or the process of constructing meaning from a text (National Reading Panel, 2000), which involves the conscious use of reading comprehension strategies (Nist & Holschuh, 2000). Reading comprehension strategies are planned and purposeful tools that strategic readers use to draw meaning from a text. These strategies help readers to engage with the text, to monitor their comprehension, and to fix comprehension when it has failed (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Nist & Holschuh, 2000). There is consensus among researchers that skilled readers have a plan for comprehending; they use a variety of reading strategies effectively to monitor their own comprehension before, during and after they read (Salembier, 1999). Research evidence supports the effectiveness of strategy training during reading as a means to enhance students' comprehension (Pressley, Johnson, Symons, McGoldrick & Kurita, 1989; Dreyer, 1998; Taraban *et al.*, 2000).

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[4] Instrumental approach to referencing refers to the knowledge of proper referencing methods and citations (Kapp and Bangeni, (2005).

South African research indicates a bleak picture with regard to the reading comprehension levels of South African students (Dukhan *et al*., 2016) as the inability of many students to read critically and with comprehension remains a problem in tertiary education. Lack of critical reading manifests when students show difficulty in selecting authors' main ideas and seeing how they have been developed into a coherent whole, resulting in students being unable to deduce, evaluate and paraphrase ideas, particularly from complex texts. The South African schooling system has robbed ESL students of the ability to engage in inferential reading, due to failure to cognitively develop and prepare students for the university' academic terrain. Undergraduates who paraphrase, and whose notes contain accurate content not provided by the lecturer, are more likely to consider links and connections with different content areas in the text, and are more likely to relate their new knowledge to their current knowledge structure. Poor inferential reading can be evidenced in poor inferential writing, thus, a student's writing can give clues to their cognitive level of engagement (Dukhan *et al*., 2016).

A study conducted by Andrews and Osman (2015) aimed at contributing to ongoing research and debate in the area of under preparedness of university students, with particular reference to the literacy skills and cognitive strategies, found that 29% of first year South African students are most likely to encounter literacy challenges before the end of their of their first year and 30% of ESL first year students are unable to graduate on schedule, and take five years to graduate (Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2007). According to Perin, (2013), the root of challenges that ESL first year students face in South Africa, is the underdevelopment of reading and writing.

In a study conducted by Nel, Dreyer and Klopper, (2004), within the Arts faculty at Potchefstroom University, in South Africa, they highlighted that reading is not explicitly assessed in tertiary institutions, and this contributes to poor reading skills and ultimately affects students' academic performance.

A relationship exists between reading and writing, as reading for academic understanding will inform writing in an academic context (Papashe & Hlale, 2014). Jubhari (2009) posits that for learners to become better writers, they have to master reading from an early age and the implication is that in order to have students who are adequately prepared for higher education in terms of academic writing, the whole schooling system from early childhood development to high school should be infused with systematic reading and writing activities to ensure

students have a smooth transition to tertiary education (Munro, 2003). Jurecic (2006) and Chokwe (2011) maintain that in order for students to be more prepared for reading, they need to read more, as reading and writing are essential in different disciplines. Practice in writing is essential for students as it allows them to explore ideas, develop positions, deliberate about problems and puzzles, make arguments and think new thoughts about the world (Jurecic, 2006; Chokwe, 2011).

2.3.4.3 Views of first year ESL university students on their academic literacy

The voices of ESL first year university students nationally and globally pertaining to their literacy practices are relevant to this study. It is in interpreting the students' own voices that I will understand their literacy experiences.

In a study conducted by Dukhan *et al*. (2016) ESL first year students from different tertiary institutions in South Africa, cite their former secondary school teachers' code switching as one of the factors affecting their current academic literacy. For instance, teachers used to explain in the vernacular when asked questions, as opposed to the university where English is the medium of instruction (Dukhan *et al*., 2016).

In a case study by Kapp and Bangeni, (2005) conducted at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, where 90% of students study through the medium of English (many students' second language), literacy practices take on an instrumental character, functional to the externally set examinations that students have to pass in order to achieve a degree (Kapp & Bangeni, 2005). A group of twenty first year students was interviewed three months after their entry into the Humanities Department at the University of Cape Town, regarding their experiences on academic literacy. Their responses included: struggling to write their thoughts in a manner that met academic literacy standards; plagiarism due to the inability to paraphrase, and lack of knowledge thereof; lack of critical analysis skills; and inexperience with critical writing skills, amongst others (Kapp & Bangeni, 2005). In an ethnographic investigation by Niven (2005) into the reading practices of a group of 14 first year students at Rhodes University (RU), South Africa, following RU's identification of all the students as underprepared for university learning, the following factors were established: the underprepared students were from poor, socioeconomic backgrounds; they used English as an additional language; and they had been educated in township or rural schools.

The study established that the under-performance on first year university students emanates from the fact that they all use English as a second language, a factor that negatively influenced their ability to cope academically at tertiary levels, as their success at tertiary level is dependent on the reading and writing of academic texts in English. In addition, students' under-performance may be due to the ways in which the literacy practices that the students brought with them from their homes and schools intersected with the literacy practices of a representative Humanities discipline, as neither lecturers nor students could make any sense of each other's literacy practices and that this meant that satisfactory teaching and learning could not proceed (Niven, 2005).

The study by Niven (2005) showed that ESL first year students have certain expectations with regard to academic literacy that they bring with them to tertiary institutions from their early literacy practices and their expectations, and this may be at cross purposes with the actual expectations of those particular institutions. According to the ESL students' reading histories, the following factors were cited as contributing to their literacy challenges: inadequate exposure to extensive and fun reading in the home or school; negative connotations associated with books and school work resulting in reluctance to read; and shortage of print material such as newspapers and magazines due to limited access to these (Niven, 2005).

The study by Niven (2005) further revealed the difference between students and lectures' expectations pertaining to the literacy practices expected at the university. This difference in expectations was revealed by the lecturer as he addressed students in their first lecture where he clearly stipulated that all first year students needed to display "the development of a good, enquiring, critical mind through engagement with a range of books" (Niven, 2005, p, 30) and encouraged them to locate the library and make use of the library books and appropriate reading material for the course. The lecturer's introductory words expressed the discipline's fundamental aims about learning and literacy (Niven, 2005) as he spelt out that first year students were expected to become self-directed, reflective readers propelled by personal interest and thus independently locate the library and resources. What becomes obvious is that universities work under the assumption that first year students possess the required literacy competence, whereas the opposite is a possibility with some of them.

A study conducted by Ngwenya (2010) at North West-University in South Africa, at Mafikeng, sought to look at English language demands on first year ESL legal students. Five

lecturers and 105 first year legal students from rural areas who had learnt in rural schools participated in the study. The study found that participants encountered reading challenges that had affected their overall academic performance negatively; the challenges included the inability to: understand and interpret instruction and text within the context; make inferences; skim and scan; distinguish between facts and opinions; recognise the relationship between words and sentences in paragraphs amongst others (Ngwenya, 2010). The challenges that participants encountered were linked to English being their second language and socioeconomic factors including having a low-income household, as 96% of students came from the rural areas of Mafikeng where most parents were unemployed. On the other hand, English Home Language students from Potchefstroom University, an English-medium university whose students are predominantly white with English or Afrikaans speaking students from households with a higher socioeconomic status, had a good overall performance in their studies due to their reading competence (Ngwenya, 2010).

In a study by McKenna (2004) at the Durban Institute of Technology, ESL students noted that they felt alienated by the university's curriculum that discouraged their cultural identity, while encouraging a western identity English-medium that was their second language. One student noted that she changed her identity and associated with the successful students in order that they teach her how to behave in an academically accepted manner, while gaining insight from them on what constitutes university success. Another student equated the English language to a language written by a professor (McKenna, 2004). What becomes clear to me from the above studies is that higher education needs to engage students in ways that will deem their identities important in relation to the new academic literacies, in order for the ESL students to benefit from the universities' literacy practices.

Some ESL first year university students find academic literacy challenging due to the fact that literacy from the school failed to equip them with good literacy skills in the form of academic reading and writing; this challenge is not unique to South Africa. A study that sought to examine language-related challenges faced by ESL first year university students in Hong Kong, as they adjust to an English-medium higher education, found that students experience four particular problems during the crucial first year at university (Evans and Morrison, 2011); these problems include understanding technical vocabulary, comprehending lectures, achieving an appropriate academic style and meeting institutional and disciplinary requirements (Evans & Morrison, 2011). When asked how participants overcome vocabulary

and comprehension challenges during their first year, their responses included a reliance on peers who attended English Home Language medium schools for clarity, as they speak better English (Evans & Morrison, 2011).

A Spanish student studying at Colombia in the United States, in an English-medium university noted that she needed improvement with her English vocabulary as it was limited compared to her mother tongue, Spanish (Zawacki & Habib 2014). In a study conducted in American university that sought to look at an integration of reading/writing skills for ESL learners in academic contexts, by Grabe and Zhang (2013), a number of challenges that ESL first year students face at the university were noted. Grabe and Zhang, (2013) listed what ESL first year students needed to learn in relation to integrated reading/writing as follows: taking notes from a text; summarising text information; paraphrasing textual resources; combining information from multiple text sources in a synthesis task; comparing multiple points of view from written texts and producing a critical synthesis; answering essay exam questions in writing (both at home and in class); writing an extended research paper or literature review; and responding to assigned texts (writing a summary and then critique).

Two key longitudinal qualitative studies of university level ESL student writers were carried out by Spack (1997) and Leki (2007). Spack followed a Japanese university student for 3 years as the student learned to write academic papers. The student believed that good writing in the United States university context was opinion-based, rather than a careful interpretation of information from assigned texts, even though teachers were pleased with her more objective synthesis writing. The student thought that she wrote poor-quality papers when she merely combined information from multiple texts. This finding indicates that teachers need to be explicit about teaching writing expectations in university contexts where personal opinions are not highly valued in synthesis writing assignments across many disciplines.

Leki (2007) followed four ESL university students, from four different majors (engineering, nursing, business, and social work), through their four years of undergraduate studies. Although each student had a very different university experience, she found that the students' writing assignments commonly involved a combination of reading and writing skills. Leki also found that the amount of writing done varied considerably across the four majors. In some cases, surprisingly little writing was required. She also noted that the four students each experienced major problems with limited vocabulary knowledge and limited reading

comprehension skills throughout their four years. The main issue for synthesis writing (as well as for summary writing) is how students use and misuse source text information. Different terms have been used by researchers to refer to instances of misuse, including plagiarism, text borrowing, text appropriation, and 'patchwriting', even though researchers have been cautious in accusing students of plagiarism when they misused source information (Li & Casanave, 2012). Studies by Shi (2012) and Li and Casanave (2012) highlight the complexities that students encounter in learning to paraphrase and refer to textual information appropriately. It is not viable simply to accuse students of plagiarism when they misuse sources in their writing; rather, instructors need to (a) be consistent about what counts as appropriate versus unacceptable source text use; (b) convey their expectations explicitly to students; and (c) devote more time to teaching students to quote, summarise, and paraphrase source information (Li & Casanave, 2012; Pecorari & Shaw, 2012; Petric, 2012).

2.4 Conclusion

Even though academic literacy is a crucial practice and a prerequisite that every student entering the university should possess, a number of English second language first year university students in South Africa and around the globe display a lack of literacy skills, yielding poor overall academic performance. Early literacy practices from the students' home and school are instrumental to students' academic literacy success. In addition, poor socioeconomic status of students' households, parental illiteracy and under-qualified English school teachers appear to contribute negatively to students' literacy development.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study worked with English Second Language first year students at a University of Technology to understand and interpret their lived experiences of their literacy practices. In order to interpret participants' lived experiences through their stories, an interpretive paradigm was chosen. A narrative research design and qualitative research approach were favoured in order to facilitate participants' narrations while answering the two research questions. In explaining how this study was conducted, this chapter provides a detailed account of factors pertaining to ethics, gatekeeper approval, recruitment of participants and sampling. This chapter further discusses the entire process of data analysis and the data methods used to generate data which included artefacts, metaphors, literate life histories and a focus group. The storage of data and disposal of data are outlined followed by the issues of rigour, trustworthiness and credibility. Limitations of the study are also considered.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm because I sought to understand literacy practices of English Second Language (ESL) first year students at a University of Technology (UoT). Check and Schutt (2012) define interpretivism as the belief that reality is socially constructed and that the goal of social scientists is to understand what meanings people give to that reality. This study sought to engage with participants' stories as they discussed their literacy practices from early literacy to current academic literacies. I therefore relied on the participants' voices to explain factors pertaining to their early literacy practices and current academic literacy practices, through their narratives. Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) point out that an interpretivist paradigm intends to understand the world of human experience, such as the influences and experiences of participants' literacy practices. The interpretivist researcher tends to rely upon the participants' views of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2009) thereby understanding the participants' own backgrounds and experiences. The interpretive paradigm is appropriate for my study as I sought to understand literacy practices of ESL first year students at a UoT. Through the participants' shared lived stories from artefacts, literate life histories and metaphors, I was able to interpret and make meaning of the participants' experiences that influenced their literacy practices.

One of the limitations to interpretive research is its abandonment of scientific procedures of verification, yielding results that cannot be generalisable to other situations, thus possibly compromising the overall benefit of interpretivist research (Mack, 2010). However, Wahyuni (2012) asserts that the interpretivist study is not interested on scientific techniques, but rather on unearthing the inside perspectives of the social phenomenon under study through the lens of the study's participants, as good social knowledge. This assertion by Wahyuni (2012) resonates with my study as this study sought to explore literacy practices of the ESL first year students at the UoT. I therefore had to allow participants to narrate their experiences on factors pertaining to their early literacy practices from the home and school, in order to interpret, analyse and retell their stories.

Another criticism of the interpretivism is that the ontological assumption is subjective, not objective, as the researcher does not use scientifically proven facts (Mack, 2010). However, it is in the thickness of data collected and analysed that an objective stance by interpretivists is taken (Mack, 2010). In this study, four data generation strategies were used to generate data to attain clarity on social reality through the eyes of different participants (Cohen *et al*., 11).

Interpretivists believe that people's perceptions construct or shape their reality (Wahyuni, 2012). Additionally, social interaction between people and their varied backgrounds, shape their experiences and reality (Wahyuni, 2012). Interpretivism operates from the premise that human perspectives and experiences are subjective, thus, social reality will differ from one individual to the next (Wahyuni, 2012). It is this realisation of subjectivity in human interpretation of their experiences that interpretivist researchers favour dialogue with the studied participants. In this study, I allowed individual participants to share their unique or common experience through different data generation methods, and these will be discussed later.

3.3 Research Approach

This study used a qualitative approach which is the "systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of textual material derived from talk or conversation", which is used in the exploration of meanings of social phenomena as experienced by individuals themselves, in their natural context (Malterud, 2001, p. 483). The primary focus of qualitative research is therefore to elicit people's stories thereby allowing participants to narrate their stories through

various methods such as conversations during interviews or focus groups, written texts and visual form (Grossoehme, 2014).

In designing this study, I was interested in "asking questions in real-world settings" (Patton, 1987, p. 21) to understand the meaning people have attached to their world through their lived experiences (Merriam, 1998). The qualitative approach enables the researcher to study people thereby observing participants in their natural environment, while focusing on their meanings and interpretations (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). A qualitative approach therefore fits with the aims and purpose of this study, as I wanted to study literacy practices of ESL first year students at a UoT through a narrative inquiry. A qualitative approach allows for learning about social reality in order to explore, describe, or explain social phenomenon; unpack the meanings people ascribe to activities, situations, events, or artefacts; build a depth of understanding about some aspect of social life; and explore new or under-researched areas (Leavy, 2015). It was in interpreting and analysing participants' data from various methods that I understood and learnt the social realities they have experienced in relation to their early and current academic literacy practices.

Bias from researchers has been identified as a major drawback in qualitative research (Grossoehme, 2014; Mack, 2010). This bias emanates from the nature of a qualitative approach that sees researchers not as disinterested outsiders who observe participants without interacting with them, but as affected by their data as the participants respond to research questions (Grossoehme, 2014). To address this, I allowed participants to respond to research questions both verbally through focus groups and feedback sessions and non-verbally through their artefacts, metaphors and literate life histories that participants thought of and chose on their own, without the interference of the researcher. In as much I was in the midst of the participants during the focus group discussion, the semi-structured nature of questions used as prompts, allowed participants to narrate their stories without intimidation. Probing further, allowed participants to give insight on their articulations thus, yielding narratives free from ambiguities and biases from my side.

The primary strength of a qualitative approach is rooted in its ability to probe for underlying values, assumptions and beliefs pertaining to culture in order to understand the driving force behind people's actions (Choy, 2014). A qualitative approach therefore resonated with my study as it allowed me to probe participants about their experiences of literacy

practices in order to answer the two research questions of the study, identified in chapter one. It was in interpreting and analysing participants' data that I gained insight into participants' world of literacy, a culturally constructed world shaped by the participants' environment, parents and teachers, amongst others (Vygotsky, 1980; Rose, 2004; Lantolf *et al*., 2015). Another strength of a qualitative approach is its affordance for a broad and open-ended inquiry that allows participants the liberty to raise issues that matter most to them, yielding objectivity from the researcher who does not have a preconceived set of issues to examine (Choy, 2014).

3.4 Research Design

This study used a narrative research as its design. Narrative research has a long history, both in and out of education, and has become popular in studies of educational experience (Clandinin, 2006). Moen (2006) is of the opinion that education and educational research are the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories where learners, teachers, and researchers are storytellers or characters in their own and others' stories. This research took the form of narrative research because as I investigated the literacy practices of ESL first year students at a UoT, I was interpreting, and analysing their experiences as presented through the various data generation strategies in order to understand their stories. In addition, narrative research is built on the theory of experience and focuses on the importance of experience as a tool for understanding and emphasising the connection between life experience and education (Dewey, 1938), which was what I intended doing in this study. Narrative research allowed me to read, understand and interpret students' real life experiences through their artefacts, metaphors, literate life stories and the focus group as they narrated their lived experiences on their early literacy practices and current academic literacy practices.

Narrative research entails a relationship between researcher and participants over time, in place or places, and in social interaction with environments (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The relationship between my students and myself started at the beginning of 2017 when I met them as their Communication lecturer and this relationship developed over time and space as I gave extra classes to those students who required further assistance in Communication. In understanding the participants' literacy experiences, I was able to understand their stories, following interpretation and analysis of field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

As a researcher, my role was to describe participants' lives, collect stories of their lives, and write narratives of their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin, 2000; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007; Clandinin, 2013). The students used their own voices in narrating their stories, thus allowing me greater comprehension of factors and influences pertaining to their lives in relation to their current academic practices, as life and education are interwoven.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) established a context of a three-dimensional narrative space. These three dimensions include temporality, sociality and place. Temporality events are in transition not permanent. Events and people have a past, present, and a future (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), and the researcher must simultaneously explore past, present, future, as well as issues pertaining to personal and social conditions, and the place where events take place. My study sought to explore early literacy practices of ESL first year students at a UoT, therefore in eliciting participants' stories, I had to establish if the participants understood the influences of their early literacy practices on their current academic literacy practices. The influences on the first year university students' academic writing can be related to time, social space and place such as their experiences that took place during a certain era or time, in a certain space or place. In other words, the participants' past, through their interaction with their environment, family members and teachers, amongst other things, had an influence on their academic literacy practices (Vygotsky, 1980; Rose, 2004; Lantolf *et al*., 2015), which is in line with sociocultural theory. I understand space to mean more than a locale and to include psychological and emotional space. As participants narrated their stories, they were taken back to that time and space that was not static but kept changing (from early literacy in the home and school literacy) (Clandinin, 2013). The previous time and space may be different from their current time and space, as learning is an ongoing process. In addition, the influences on the participants' academic writing could be temporary, as the effects of the influences could be corrected with appropriate intervention.

The second dimension of narrative research is sociality, where personal and social conditions are discussed. Personal conditions may include participants and inquirer's feelings, hopes, desires and reactions, amongst others (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Social conditions include people, living conditions and the environment, amongst other factors, that shape the context of each individual. In relation to my study, as I explored literacy practices of ESL first year students at a UoT, and there was a possibility that different social conditions influenced

participants' literacy practices. Such social conditions could be socio-economic status, socio-political status, level of education of parents, and the nature of the education system the first year students went through, amongst others (Chu & Wu, 2010).

The third dimension is place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This dimension requires the narrative inquirer to think through the role each place plays on the participant's experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2006). As the researcher engages in the study, they work within that place throughout the study. The study takes place in research fields, a place where participants narrate their stories while the inquirer collects and compiles field texts for research texts (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin *et al*., 2007; Clandinin, Lessard, & Caine, 2012; Huber, Caine, Huber & Steeves, 2013); Clandinin, 2013). In my study, the participants and the inquirer agreed that our meetings ought to be away from the UoT where the participants study so they could feel free to tell their stories in a different but relaxed place.

Even though narrative research was favoured for the current study, it has its limitations. The major drawback associated with narrative research is its time-consuming nature during the analysis of data (Choy, 2014). However, a work plan stipulating steps or activities and due dates was drawn up before the commencement of the research in order to address time management. In addition, participants were partnering with me during the entire process of field text gathering, as I constantly gave them feedback after analysing each data source. Giving constant feedback allowed me to strengthen and deepen my understanding on what the participants might have said, while also allowing participants to add where they felt I fell short and make alterations where they felt misunderstood. Feedback sessions therefore ensured that unnoticed issues pertinent to participants' storied experiences were addressed. The use of four generation instruments also aided with regard to thick descriptions of field text, thus yielding greater authenticity.

The generally open-ended nature of narrative research, resulting in participants having more control over the data generated, often results in data that is not objectively verifiable (Choy, 2014), which is another drawback to narrative research. However, it is the very nature of narrative research which operates from the premise that people are storytellers that narrate their experiences best (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2006), that narrative research was favoured for this study.

3.5 Ethics, Gatekeeper approval, Recruitment of participants and Sampling

3.5.1 Ethics and gatekeeper approval

Permission to conduct research was granted by the Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Technology where this study took place prior to the research commencement (see Appendix 3). In compliance with ethics requirements, an application was forwarded to the University Ethics Committee at the university where I am registered, for recommendation. It was only upon full ethical clearance (see Appendix 4) approval from the university and on receipt of the gatekeeper's letter from the UoT where the study was conducted, that potential participants were recruited and provided with consent forms (see Appendix 1) to ensure their agreement for participation in this study. The consent form, written in English and isiZulu, was given and read to participants in order to clarify terms of their participation after which participants signed their agreement. In ensuring ethical standards, consent forms included the following important factors: anonymity of participants was ensured by using pseudonyms; participation was not in any way to influence their marks, as they were students I assessed; participants' student numbers were not a requirement; the name of the institution was not to be disclosed; their participation was voluntary; and participants could withdraw at any stage of research should they so desire, without any negative consequences to themselves (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Participants were made aware that all data would be kept confidential, in a safe lockable cabinet, at the inquirer's home for five years, after which the audio recorded conversations would be deleted while other data would be shredded.

3.5.2 Recruitment of participants and sampling

To recruit participants, I made an announcement during the Communication lecture to all my students, inviting students who wanted to participate in my study, having made the decision to work with eight students. The class comprised 38 students and 8 students represented approximately 21% of the class. The sample size used in qualitative research methods is often smaller than that used in quantitative research methods (Dworkin, 2012). This occurs because qualitative research methods are often concerned with gathering an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or are focused on meanings which are often centred on the 'how' and the 'why' of a particular issue, process, situation or set of social interactions (Dworkin, 2012). The first eight students to respond to my announcement were selected as participants hence, my sampling method was convenience sampling. I entered the research process understanding that

convenience sampling might mean that I was working with the most interested or enthusiastic students, and not necessarily a representative sample.

Convenience sampling is a type of sampling where participants of a particular target population meet certain practical criteria, such as geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate in a particular study (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim 2016). In my study, the UoT where I lectured was an ideal geographical location as it allowed both the participants (the target population) and myself the convenience of interacting with one another on a daily basis during Communication lectures and the convenience of campus meetings, particularly for one-on-one feedback purposes. In addition, convenience sampling refers to choosing a sample that is easy for the researcher to access (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Etikan *et al*., 2016) and because I taught these students, I used a convenience sampling method to select my participants. Furthermore, I had built a relationship of trust with them, as they were part of an annual group of students and thus attended lectures all year, which allowed me sufficient time for our interactions and easy access.

There has been criticism against convenience sampling on the grounds that it appears to be less demanding in terms of cost and time while risking poor quality research (Oppong, 2013). However, other means were employed to ensure quality research (discussed later). Inclusion criteria for participation rested on two factors, namely: being a first year student at a UoT and being an ESL speaker. All eight participants met the requirements.

Creswell (2013) suggests that it is preferable to collect as many details as possible from fewer individuals and in Morse's (1994) opinion, the researcher should select a sample of six participants in order to understand the experiences of participants. I intended understanding the participants' experiences with regard to their literacy practices thus developing a collective story, and selected eight participants. The reason for not selecting six participants, as advocated by Morse (1994), was that I considered a suggestion by Emmel (2013) that allowed for a scenario in which participants withdrew from the study.

The participants were from the annual Tourism Group and I interacted with them during Communication lectures. This module requires well-honed literacy skills as it requires students to learn, comprehend and practice various communication skills and theories such as: listening skills; communication theory; barriers to communication; non-verbal communication;

intercultural communication; small group communication; reading for comprehension skills (skimming and scanning); writing skills (paragraph development); report writing; research; report assignments; business writing and oral presentation skills. The nature of the Communication module therefore made the participants suitable for the study as they had to demonstrate understanding of various literacy skills.

3.5.3 The sample

The following information reflects the participants who were part of the study:

Category	Participants
Female	5
Male	3
African	8
Home Language: IsiZulu	7
Home Language: IsiXhosa	1
Orphans	2
Raised by biological parents	3
Raised by relatives	3
Low socio-economic background	5
Middle socio-economic background	3
Raised by literate parents	3
Raised by illiterate parents	5

Table 1: Information about participants

The demographics of the class comprised African students who were ESL speakers. The fact that all class members were African and ESL speakers allowed me to meet the requirements of my study as I intended exploring literacy practices of ESL first year students at a UoT. The entire class comprised 38 students with 28 female and 10 males.

Most of the Tourism students in my group relied on student funding such as National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) for their studies, as they came from underprivileged families due to unemployment and other social factors such single parenting and illiteracy, resulting in some students having to secure part-time employment in order to commute to lectures. In addition, some of the participants were orphans and others were the only formally educated

people in their households, making them breadwinners as they took care of their families while studying. Below are brief vignettes of the eight participants:

Participant A

Participant A is a female student in her early twenties. She lost her grandfather at about two to three years of age. She has been moving with her mother, aunts and siblings from place to place. Before she started school, she moved in with her aunt and uncle who took her to a former Indian schools that had a school population comprising Indians, Coloured and Africans.

Participant B

Participant B is a female teenager, who went to Grade R in a township school. She then attended former Indian schools throughout her school years. Her grandmother, who is a literate IsiZulu speaker, is the only bread winner who feeds the participant, her uncles, aunts and their children from her pension. The participant has to remind herself to finish her studies and get a job so she can help her grandmother to raise her two siblings.

Participant C

Participant C is a female student who comes from a deep rural area. She lost her mother at a very young age before going to school, and as a result she has no memory of her. Her grand-mother raised her and her extended family from her pension.

Participant D

Participant D is a teenager who attended pre-school in an Indian community. She then attended former Model C schools from Grade R to Grade 12. She was elected Class Captain in Grades 10 and 11 after which, she mentored Grade 8 learners when she was in Grade 12. Her parents are professionals who earn an average income.

Participant E

Participant E was raised by his grandmother in a rural area but left his grandmother before attending crèche. He then lived with his parents in a township and they took him to English-medium schools throughout his schooling. The thirty-something student, matriculated in 2004 and had been working for about 10 years prior to enrolling at a UoT.

Participant F

Participant F is a male student in his early twenties who was raised by his literate IsiZulu mother in a rural area and had attended rural primary and high schools.

Participant G

Participant G is in her early twenties and has a child. She grew up in townships and calls herself a township girl. She has been to a township crèche and township schools.

Participant H

Participant H is a male student in his early twenties who was born in a township and has attended township schools from pre-school through to high school. In Grade 1, his entire class sat on the floor as there was lack of adequate infrastructure at school. His classroom was overcrowded.

3.5.4 Data Generation Strategies

My field texts were generated from the participants' artefacts, metaphors, literate life histories and the focus group. These field texts were then used to compile my research text. Field texts are composed or co-composed by researchers and participants (Clandinin, 2013). I had individual conversations with participants throughout the study in order to broaden and deepen my understanding of participants' stories as I sought to analyse them. Field texts therefore become co-compositions, reflecting the interpretations of both the researcher and participants (Clandinin, 2013).

The process of understanding stories requires an ongoing interpretation of the lived experiences by both the researcher and participants in order for the researcher to understand participants' stories (Clandinin, 2013). The conversations with participants or feedback became an ongoing occurrence aimed at broadening and deepening my understanding of participants' stories and the participants' understanding and approval of my interpretation of their stories. In order for interpretation to take place, the narrative researcher lives in the field with participants (Clandinin, 2000; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013). A field is a geographical place or locale where both the participants and researcher may gather for sharing stories or field texts whether in the classroom, or any meeting place where stories are narrated (Clandinin, 2013). As the participants' lecturer at the UoT where the study was conducted, I was always in their geographical place for the entire year.

The researcher begins to compose field texts, which may be gathered from photographs, conversation transcripts and interview transcripts amongst others (Clandinin, 2000; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013). In ensuring that participants were able to narrate their stories well, participants were allowed to communicate in either English, IsiZulu or both languages, throughout the field text gathering process.

In this study, I used four data generating instruments: artefacts, metaphors, literate life histories and a focus group. The artefacts were used to remind the participants of their early literacy practices to elicit their stories while responding to the first research question. Metaphors then allowed participants to reflect on where they were with their academic literacy, while literate life histories provided a timeline or plot (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), from early literacy exposure to current academic literacy, in a detailed story of their experiences. Lastly, the focus group, with the questions used as prompts, allowed participants to respond to both research questions. The focus group also allowed participants to validate if my interpretation of their literate life histories resonated with their stories, thus enabling trustworthiness. The focus group was thus purely for member-checking and validation purposes.

3.5.4.1 Arts-based field texts

Arts-based research has its origins in the qualitative paradigm from the practice of creative arts therapy taking place in the fields of psychiatry and psychology, where arts-based field texts are used as ways of expressing what cannot be conveyed in conventional language (McNiff, 2013). Arts-Based Educational Research refers to the use of artistic forms of expressions to convey the intended message and meaning in research (Barone & Eisner, 1997), such as artefacts, metaphors, drama and music amongst others (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2013). According to Norris, Mbokazi, Rorke, Goba, and Mitchell (2007), new arts-based activities can be very effective for a variety of reasons, ranging from the high interest of many young people in engaging in creative activities, the importance of a focus on the learners themselves and their thoughts and feelings, to the need for relatively less demanding and non-intimidating activities. Studies by Eisner (2008) and Mason (2006) have highlighted the strengths of visual and art-based methods in research (Bagnoli, 2009). Eisner (2008) argues that interviews, which have long been favoured by qualitative researchers, can disadvantage those people who may not be conversant with a particular medium of communication (Eisner, 2008). In addition, peoples' daily existence also involves visual and sensory dimensions therefore, in order to better understand them, the researchers need to be able to investigate and

interpret non-linguistic dimensions of human communication thus aiding researchers' access to people's different levels of experience (Eisner, 2008). Moreover, the creative mix of data in research encourages research participants to generate new ways to interact with the understanding of social issues, while allowing participants to think out of the box (Bagnoli, 2009).

In my study, I used two art-based field texts, namely artefacts and metaphors. I chose artefacts as they allowed participants to think creatively of their early literacy practices thereby providing me with the objects, individually and independently chosen, which were representations of those literacies, and metaphors, also individually and independently chosen, were used by participants to depict their current academic literacy. I am aware that the use of visual images in research may invoke various ethical concerns on issues pertaining to the truthfulness of data and being deemed as a quick fix to doing research (Mitchell, 2008). In addressing these concerns, I ensured that artefacts and metaphors were accompanied by participants' brief narratives on their intended meanings.

The use of visual research methods such as metaphors (photos, drawings amongst others) may address the imbalance between research process and the product, resulting in a more equitable and negotiated research relationship (Toon, 2008). In addressing and dealing with social issues, visuals become a natural extension of ideas of agency, action, joint action and collaboration where both the participant and the researcher collaborate with regard to understanding and interpretation of participants' stories (Toon, 2008). I collaborated with participants throughout the research process as I relied on their validation in interpreting their stories. The use of visual research methods goes beyond recording of data, but rather, offers a mode of assisting the researcher realise participants' dimensions that would otherwise remain hidden (Toon, 2008). Visual methods of research therefore democratise the research relationship between the researcher and the participants throughout the research process as meaning making becomes a collective effort between the researcher and the participants (Toon, 2008). One-on-one interactions between the researcher and the participants is encouraged by visual research methods in order for the researcher to interpret the participants' intended realities as the unpacking and discussions of such realities becomes a joint venture between the participants and the researcher (Toon, 2008). I had one-on-one interactions after each layer of data analysis in order to strengthen and deepen my understanding of participants' lived experiences.

I am aware that images may be considered a selective account of reality that may potentially overwhelm the researcher, yielding improper analysis of content (Mitchell, 2008) therefore, in the current study, participants brought their narratives to further explain their stories. Various data generation methods were used in order to strengthen trustworthiness and authenticity of data. One-on-one feedback sessions allowed for interactive conversations where participants voiced either approval or disapproval regarding my interpretation of their stories. Additional information shared during feedback, enabled me to note it and incorporate it into my narration of their lived experiences. Another possible limitation attributed to the use of visual methodologies in research has been the time consuming nature and the amount of effort expected of the researchers to generate and interpret data, resulting in frustration (Mitchell, 2008). I drew the research work plan with stipulated timeframes before the commencement of the research. Participants were made aware that I needed three months (September, October and November 2017) of their time for data generation purposes. Participants were made aware through the work plan provided to them that only five interactions were a requirement for feedback, to be conducted after each layer of data analysis.

3.5.4.1.1 Artefacts

In my study, participants' artefacts were visual representations of their experiences of their early literacy practices, which was a response to my first research question: 'what are ESL first year students' experiences of literacy practices?' The artefacts were produced individually by each participant and I analysed each artefact individually. I chose artefacts as a vessel for participants through which to express their experiences of early literacy practices because an artefact is "an object that has cultural and/or historical significance" (Pithouse-Morgan & van Laren, 2012, p. 3). I was hoping the artefacts the participants would provide carried both cultural and historic significance in relation to their early literacy practices as early practices can be influenced by the environment culturally and historically (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, I used artefacts to aid participants generate their thinking about their literate life histories.

The use of artefacts originates from visual research, where researchers often rely on the use of objects, as they believe it is through seeing, that the study develops (Pithouse-Morgan & van Laren, 2012). This belief by visual researchers sees an object as the primary source of data, before drawing on other forms of representing the information (Pithouse-Morgan & van Laren, 2012). Likewise, I used artefacts as the primary source of field texts as I was hoping

they would allow participants to use their memories creatively in recalling events around their early literacy practices which would assist in eliciting their stories. I gave participants an instruction that they needed to bring an object that represented the status of their academic literacy at the UoT in terms of their performance and their feelings thereof (refer to Appendix 7). Furthermore, Prown (1982), in the area of material culture, emphasises the importance of studying artefacts as he defines material culture as a study that uses artefacts to illustrate beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions of a particular community or society at a particular time. As noted earlier, culture, through parental teachings, has an influence on human beings' literacy practices (Vygotsky, 1980). Participants submitted brief written narratives with their artefacts. Participants' written narratives on their artefacts' meaning, assisted with insight on the participants' choice of artefacts and their interpretation thereof.

Even though McNiff (2012) and Mitchell (2008) cite potential lack of authenticity on findings from artefacts (and other arts-based research methods), participants in the current study provided both their artefacts and narratives that sought to give meaning and clarity on their own interpretations on the chosen artefacts. Furthermore, to counter scepticism that may arise regarding confidentiality and anonymity of data generated from the use of visual research methods such as artefacts (Mitchell, 2008), I coded all data to protect participants' identities and made use of pseudonyms.

3.5.4.1.2 Metaphors

To investigate my second research question (What are students' past literacy practices and how do they enable and /or constrain their current literacy practices?), I used participants' metaphors, as they enabled me to answer the question. Metaphor refers to the use of drawings, pictures and other visuals that metaphorically represent one's experiences, feelings and ideas that may be difficult to articulate in words (Van Laren, Pithouse-Morgan, Muthukrishna, Naicker, Singh, Chisanga & Meyiwa, 2014). McShane (2005) considers the metaphor to be an artistic and conceptualised linguistic device that facilitates meaning through imagination to describe and explore individuals' feelings, actions and being. Furthermore, McShane (2005) regards the use of metaphors as a creative strategy that can carry with it other hidden messages that could not have been articulated in the description of the lived experiences. Through using accessible and inexpensive hand drawings, critical issues may be explored in an unthreatening and playful manner (Van Laren *et al*., 2014), making metaphors simple yet powerful ways of

gaining deep insight into significant experiences, to represent, examine and better understand professional knowledge and practice (Tidwell & Manke, 2009).

The use of metaphors and creative research methods allows for the investigation of layers of people's experiences resulting in a holistic communication of self that can enhance empathy while capturing the unspeakable and sensitive experiences, as well as paying attention to reality in different ways, as opposed to conventional ways of thinking with ready-made answers (Bagnoli, 2009). The use of visuals can be beneficial to research as they are participants' preferred objects for personal interpretation of their views and sentiments on a given phenomenon (Mitchell, 2008). I found metaphors to be beneficial to my study as participants were able to bring metaphors of their choice such as drawings and pictures which best represented their feelings and experiences about their current academic literacy experiences, allowing participants to use creative ways of representation rather than presenting their feelings only in written form. Metaphors became their metaphoric representation of their academic literacy, and photos and other visuals can include captions or interpretive writing in order to assist the researcher interpret participants' real stories (Mitchell, 2008).

The visual nature of metaphors has led to a criticism toward their effectiveness in providing accurate insights to participants' stories, despite the potential advantages of visual representation in research (Leavy, McSorley & Boté, 2007). To address this factor, I asked participants to provide a brief narration that shed light to their understanding and interpretation of metaphors of their choice. I used participants' metaphors and their written narratives to ensure that I understood the intended meaning, not my perceived meaning, thus, allowing my interpretation to resonate with the participants' stories, for authenticity.

3.5.4.1.3 Literate life histories

Literate life history refers to a written story or account of an individual's life (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015). Literate life histories of the participants were beneficial to my study as these field texts shed more light on the literacy practices of the participants, thus broadening and deepening my understanding of how the participants understood the influences of their early literacy practices on their current academic literacy practices.

Through the analyses of life history narratives, academics and practitioners in a range of social science fields have established that literate life history, although narrowly focused on an

individual, family or small group of participants, is more holistic than what can be concluded by observation, or using other methodological tools (Ojermark, 2007). In giving an holistic, written narration of their experiences of their literacy development, participants were filling gaps between their past and present literacy practices thus providing a timeline or plot of their story from early literacy experiences to their current academic literacy. Literate life histories therefore responded to the two research questions of this study namely: 'what are ESL first year students' experiences of literacy practices?', and 'what are students' past literacy practices and how do they enable and / or constrain their current literacy practices?' An instruction I gave to participants was that they each needed to write a life story where they took me through their literacy experiences from their early literacies (from the home and school) to the university literacy practices.

3.5.4.1.4 Focus group

The use of focus groups is a potentially efficient method of generating data in a qualitative research study as it allows for conversations within a small group of people on a given topic (Silverman, 2015). Kitzinger (1995) cites several benefits of using focus groups in gathering field text, the first being that they do not discriminate against people who cannot or find it difficult to read or write and they encourage participation from people who may be reluctant to be interviewed. Additionally, focus groups promote communication between research participants for data generation purposes, as they are interactive in nature, encouraging participants to talk to one another thereby asking questions, exchanging narratives and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view (Kitzinger, 1995). Lastly, focus groups are beneficial for exploring people's knowledge and experiences as they allow people to express what they think, how they think and why they think that way regarding a particular phenomenon under investigation (Kitzinger, 1995). In agreement with Kitzinger (1995), I found the focus group to be relaxed and less stressful than formal interviews. Focus groups were appropriate for my study as I sought clarity from participants on issues pertaining to their literacy practices as first year UoT students.

The focus group further broadened and deepened what the first year students chose as their artefacts, metaphors and their narrated literate life histories. The discussions were semi-structured, as I first explained to students what I wanted to find out or what I was looking for. I made use of some questions as prompts for discussions (see Appendix 4). The focus group allowed participants to have prompted conversations that sought to shed more light on their

early literacy and current academic literacy, as participants responded to questions used as prompts in order to ensure that each participant' past, present and future or continuity was captured (Clandinin, 2013). As the students engaged in discussions, their interactions were audio recorded then transcribed as field texts for the purposes of trustworthiness (Cohen *et al*., 2013). Furthermore, non-verbal cues were noted as they could be crucial, yet could not be recorded by the equipment. The focus group also addressed the issue of trustworthiness, a necessity in a qualitative inquiry, as the findings from the focus group were verified against those from the artefacts, metaphors and literate life histories. The focus group thus enabled member checks and to validation of the findings.

3.6 Data Analysis and Feedback to participants

As the process of data analysis involves transcription of lengthy data into smaller or simple basics, a qualitative researcher needs to possess the ability to present a cohesive representation of data that is meaningful in a transparent, rigorous manner, while remaining authentic to participants' interpretations (Noble & Smith, 2015). I aimed to ensure that field texts were co-compositions by both the researcher and the participants throughout the analysis process (Clandinin, 2013). The starting point of my analysis was to draft interpretations of the texts which I confirmed through interaction with participants and in partnership with participants, as suggested by Clandinin (2013). These initial drafts served as the interim research texts or field texts, that are open to allow participants and researchers opportunities to further explore interpretations and to negotiate the possibility of multiple meanings (Clandinin, 2013). What therefore became clear to me was that, giving feedback individually to participants was crucial throughout the field text analysis process, in order for me to be able to understand participants' stories well. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2013) state that qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities, which is what I was engaged in. The purpose and outcome of data analysis is to reveal to others through fresh insights what is observed and discovered about human conditions (Saldaña, 2011).

I used thematic analysis (TA) to analyse field texts. TA refers to themes or specific patterns of meaning or content found in the data (Joffe, 2012). Since TA can be subjective, specific criteria regarding what needs to be recorded is stipulated (Joffe, 2012).The content found in

the data can be implicit or explicit, and explicit themes usually point to implicit themes (Joffe, 2012). It is through interpretation of the explicit themes underpinning the study that the deduction of implicit themes are achieved (Joffe, 2012; Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Themes can either be drawn from the theoretical idea that the researcher brings to research (deductive) or from raw data itself (inductive) (Joffe, 2012). In this study, themes were both deductive and inductive. As the purpose of the study was to explore literacy practices of ESL first year students at a UoT, I already had categories such as early literacy, school literacy and academic literacy as the overarching categories from which themes and sub-themes could emerge. TA therefore makes use of coding in order to categorise data (Joffe, 2012). The coding of all the field text gathered from four instruments (artefacts, metaphors, literate life histories and focus group) was both inductive and deductive.

My first layer of field text analysis was to interpret the participants' artefacts, which were the visual representation of their early literacy practices which responded to my first research question: 'what are ESL first year students' experiences of literacy practices?' Participants also submitted brief narratives with their artefacts. TA ensured that themes from the participants' narratives were identified and coded under relevant categories on the table. Upon completion of the first layer of analysis, participants were given an opportunity to confirm if what had been captured resonated with their stories.

The second layer of analysis involved interpretation and analysis of participants' metaphors and their accompanying brief narratives. Further themes were identified and categorised in the table, after which participants were given individual feedback which allowed them to authenticate my interpretation and analysis of their stories. Metaphors responded to the second research question: 'what are students' past literacy practices and how do they enable and/ or constrain their current literacy practices?'

The third layer of analysis was to analyse participants' literate life histories in depth. I identified additional themes, which were justified through the documentation of verbatim phrases and sentences throughout the field texts analysis section to capture participants' true feelings and viewpoints (Cohen *et al*., 2011), as participants' direct words were captured for authenticity. Such quotations enhanced and exemplified the themes of the study by adding personal data (Rule & John, 2011). Verbatim expressions also strengthened trustworthiness (Cohen *et al*., 2011). Participants' literate life histories answered both research questions. In

this level of analysis, I was looking at the coherence of the plot from artefacts which represented participants' early literacy practices to the events and experiences that yielded their current academic literacy practices (as represented in the metaphors), which yielded new themes that served to verify what was identified in the first and second layer of analysis. The new themes assisted me broaden and deepen my understanding of participants' lived stories in relation to their literacy practices from early literacies to current academic literacies, yielding trustworthiness. As additional themes surfaced, they were categorised and noted in the table. Upon completion of the third layer of field texts analysis, I provided feedback to participants that allowed for one-on-one conversations with participants.

The fourth layer of analysis took place after the focus group discussions. I identified commonalities and differences as new themes surfaced and I coded them, as before. Additional themes and subthemes were noted. Feedback was then given to participants individually as it allowed me to probe further where I needed clarity and where there were contradictions in the story line. The constant feedback I gave to participants upon completion of each layer of analysis, enhanced trustworthiness and authenticity, crucial in a qualitative study (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). This process assisted in alleviating researcher biasness (Bertram & Christian, 2015) through misinterpretation of the participants' stories.

In the process of composing and co-composing interim texts, life experiences are awakened and new themes become visible, necessitating the need for a researcher to go back to participants for further inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). I went back to participants not only for further inquiry but also for clarity. I could ask questions to verify my interpretation against the participants' stories. Furthermore, the feedback sessions where transcriptions of recorded field texts and the tables were shown to the participants so that they could verify whether my interpretations resonated with their narrated stories, enabled the findings to represent negotiated representations between researcher and researched (Dodge, Ospina, & Foldy, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2007; Clandinin, 2013). Overall, while narratives were produced by participants, the analysis of the narratives was undertaken using thematic analysis, and the findings were presented thematically.

3.7 Storage of data and disposal of data

Field texts from artefacts, metaphors, literate life histories and the focus group were safely stored in a locked filing cabinet at my home and in a password-protected computer from the commencement of research to the final writing of the dissertation. Data will be stored for a period of five years, then all documents will be shredded and audio recordings will be deleted.

3.8 Rigour, trustworthiness, credibility

Even though narrative research shares a common foundation with other approaches in qualitative interpretivist research, it has its own features that need to be taken into account in order to assess its quality. Because narrative inquiry is rooted in storytelling and attention to stories demands attention to individuals who tell them, researchers are encouraged to integrate concerns about rigour (Dodge *et al.*, 2005).

When researchers assess the quality of their work, they are mostly concerned with rigour as the application of method, therefore researchers need to ask whether their interpretations are rigorous, and whether interpretations provide clarity on some worthy social problem (Dodge *et al.*, 2005). Rigour refers to an awareness of the types and levels of interpretation that take place in the inquiry, and that findings represent negotiated representations between researcher and researched (Dodge *et al.*, 2005). To ensure rigour, four field gathering methods were used, namely artefacts, metaphors, literate life histories and a focus group. In addition, artefacts and metaphors were accompanied by participants' brief written narratives that sought to present the participants' interpretations of their chosen arts-based representations (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). These instruments allowed me in-depth interpretation and analysis of participants' experiences with regard to literacy practices. As feedback was constantly given to participants throughout the four layers of the field text analysis process, participants were able to authenticate or question my interpretations, thus adding necessary information where they needed to and asking questions for clarity as the need arose.

Furthermore, the diversified nature of the four methods of generating field text (artefacts, metaphors, literate life histories and a focus group) yielded trustworthiness, a feature crucial for both qualitative research and narrative research (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). Students made use of their artefacts to represent their early literacy practices and metaphor drawings to represent their current academic literacy at UoT. Literate life histories filled the gaps between the participants' past (early literacy practices) and their present (academic literacy) experiences,

thereby providing a timeline of their experiences and the focus group discussion allowed participants to shed more light on their stories, and to check if I had interpreted their stories accurately.

As narrative research is rooted in storytelling, the inquirer needs to ensure that internal consistency is maintained. Internal consistency refers to a constant narration or account of events where one part of the narrative does not contradict what the participant had said in another part (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). In order to maintain internal consistency, the constant feedback and verification from participants and the final confirmation during the focus group enabled a measure of trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness was also attained by using thick descriptions referring to the depth or "thickness" of the description needed by a researcher to report (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 123). Audio-recording the focus group discussion and transcribing data verbatim, ensured that rigour and trustworthiness were attained, as verbatim expressions ensured that I had not altered what was narrated by the participants. Additionally, notes were taken during the focus group in order to capture participants' gestures and expressions that would not have been captured over the audio-recorder, further strengthening trustworthiness (Silverman, 2014). It was in giving constant feedback that trustworthiness, crucial to qualitative research (Cohen *et al*., 2013), was addressed, while alleviating researcher biasness.

Credibility is crucial for narrative research, as it allows for a true reflection of participants' reality, thus ensuring that the study explores what it actually intended (Guba, 1981), yielding validity and trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Diversified data generation strategies may be used by the researcher to sustain credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Guba, 1981). In my study, I used four data generation methods in order ensure participants accounted for clear story lines, free from contradictions. In addition, varied data strengthened trustworthiness and validity as constant feedback and interactions were a part of the interpretation and then creation of the research text (Clandinin, 2013). Constant feedback was given, through ongoing one-on-one interactions which aimed at seeking participants' further clarity, approval or disapproval on what constituted their lived realities, thus, strengthening credibility of research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Guba, 1981).

3.9 Limitations of the methodology

There was an element of uncertainty in carrying out the study as the participants were my students. I was concerned that they would feel obliged to impress me with what they thought I wanted to hear, as opposed to narrating real stories of their literacy practices. In addressing the concern, participants were made aware that there was no wrong or right story, and all responses and stories were valid and worthwhile and that their narratives were to be used solely for research purposes. The diversified field texts generated from four instruments enabled me to trace the participants' storyline (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and consistency thereof.

Additionally, the participants may have felt that their academic performance would be influenced by their stories. However, participants were made aware prior to signing their consent forms that their participation was purely for research purposes thus could not affect their academic performance. For such reasons, participants were made aware of the use of pseudonyms for anonymity (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015). Furthermore, participants were made aware prior to signing their consent that their names and student numbers were not a requirement. A neutral field for discussions was chosen by all the participants in order to ensure it was conducive for free communication without any intimidation, outside the university perimeters.

Another source of uncertainty stemmed from the use of the focus group as a data generation method. The uncertainty was sparked by the fact that all eight participants were classmates and could possibly feel that their confidentiality was compromised, feel uncomfortable narrating personal experiences and possibly withhold some crucial information. However, participants were made aware at the commencement of research and reminded prior to the focus group that they were expected to share their stories in a group. This reminder was done to allow participants liberty to either continue participation or terminate their participation. All participants opted for the continuation of participation.

Since the study focused on first year students, availability due to time constraints was a challenge, particularly for the narrative inquiry that is time consuming in nature. In addressing the challenge, participants agreed that meetings would be held on specific Saturdays, at particular times. Participants were also made aware of the proposed work plan, thus allowing an opportunity to plan their months from 2 September to 14 October 2017.

3.10   Conclusion

The research paradigm of this study, interpretivism, resonated with both the qualitative research approach and the narrative design. Four diversified field text generation methods used in the study were able to respond to the two research questions while the four layers of field text analysis and constant feedback to participants after each layer of analysis strengthened the rigour, trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data and the analysis of the data derived through the use of artefacts, metaphors, literate life histories and a focus group. This chapter presents the two main themes that were derived from the generated data and includes a discussion of these themes. The two overarching themes are: English Second Language (ESL) first year students' experiences of literacy practices and English Second Language first year students' understanding of the influences of their early literacy practices on their current academic literacy. These themes are underpinned by the research questions: What are English Second Language first year students' experiences of literacy practices? What are English Second Language first year students' past literacy practices and how do they enable/ constrain their current literacy practices? The data is derived from participants' narratives and the analysis of the narratives is thematically analysed.

4.2 Theme One: English Second Language first year students' experiences of their literacy practices

4.2.1 Experiences of current academic writing practices

The data from the literate life histories indicated that seven of the eight participants (A, B, C, D, E, F and H) noted that they encountered challenges with academic writing. For example, they noted: "*I'm supposed to analyse, criticise..., lecturers call it academic writing. This is one area where I'm really struggling*" (Participant A); "*Academic writing at university is my major challenge*" (Participant E) and "*I am struggling with academic writing*" (Participant F). These views were reinforced by participants A, C, F, and H in the focus group as well, with the comment "*Academic writing is hard*" (Participants F and H) being repeated. What I gathered from participants A, B, C, D, E, F and H's comments was the possibility that their schooling did not put much emphasis on academic literacy. It is likely that the abovementioned participants were not taught how to criticise and evaluate texts, and thus lacked familiarity with such competencies. Even though the standards for the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) for both English Home Language (HL) and English First Additional Language (FAL) learners from Grade 10 to 12 are to evaluate reading, no particular mention of texts beyond transactional writing (narrative, discursive, argumentative and other forms of essays) is mentioned (DoE, 2011). The activities outlined in the CAPS document such as pre-

writing, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading and presenting a written text puts the spotlight on applying such competencies with regard to transactional writing, could be an attempt by the Department of Education (DoE) to introduce learners to academic literacy. Cognitive levels for assessments for English HL and FAL learners include literal (Level 1), reorganisation (Level 2), inference (Level 3), evaluation (Level 4) and appreciation (Level 5) types of questions (DoE, 2011). What is implied by the nature of assessment tools is that by the time learners leave school in Grade 12 they should be able to evaluate, analyse, infer and think and write critically.

It becomes clear that that the DoE, through policy, has attempted to expose learners to literacy practices at school. However, the DoE might have not succeeded in ensuring that the school literacies prepare learners to transition to the university literacies. The possibility of participants' (A, B, C, D, E, F and H) lack of exposure to literacy skills from the school, despite the fact that literacy is a requirement by the DoE, through the CAPS document, could also be indicative of their school teachers' inability to offer such competencies. If this is true, it could possibly have stemmed from participants' teachers' limited knowledge in English, if it was their second or third language. Of concern was the fact that Participants A, B, D and E attended English Home Language schools and had probably been taught by English first language teachers who most likely had an English qualification. Participants A and B attended Indian schools and the medium of instruction was English. Similarly, Participants D and E attended former Model C schools that were regarded as better equipped in terms of resources and qualified teachers (Bloch, 2009). It appeared that Participants A, B, D and E's high school teachers had not equipped them with basic academic literacy competencies, even though they would have been better qualified. This is despite the findings of Spaull (2013) who found that former Model C schools often have teachers who are more effective than those that served and continue to serve former Black schools.

While the literate life histories revealed that seven of the eight participants struggled with academic writing, the focus group with eight participants revealed two participants (D and E) who found that academic writing was manageable, with one noting that "*Academic writing is good*" (Participant, D) and the other saying that "*Academic writing is generally not so bad*" (Participant, E). These views might be explained by the fact that both participants D and E attended English Home Language medium schools from pre-school to secondary school, came from average income households with professional parents and were exposed to English

literature in the home, prior to formal school instruction, and where their parents were literate in English. It appears that they were exposed to English books and consequently this might have put them at an advantage in terms of literacy skills. If this view is true, it is in line with Chu and Wu's (2010) understanding of the impact of parental educational levels on the development of children's literacy. Chu and Wu found that higher average family income has a positive influence on the child's literacy development as it is able to provide opportunities to familiarise the child with literacy.

The fact that Participants D and E had initially noted in their literate life histories that they encountered challenges with academic writing but later said the opposite during the focus group could have been an indication that both participants were trying to impress their peers. Perhaps the fact that participants D and E attended former Model C schools made them feel duty bound to say the things they said in front of their peers. Such an interpretation of Participant E's responses could be explained by his narrative of his metaphor as he noted "*I'm pretending to be calm and having all together while inside, I'm broken*". These words indicate the possibility that Participant E covers his true feelings, and possibly knew that the expectation from his peers was that he excelled in academic writing as it was administered in English, a language he had learnt as a first language at school, even though it was not his mother tongue; this possibility could be further supported by the choice of his metaphor.

Participant E's metaphor

Furthermore, the possibility that Participant E could be pretending to possess the literacy competencies required by the university could have also been a gendered response to express his idea of masculinity and his age, as his gender was in the minority, and he was the only participant in his thirties; perhaps he felt embarrassed to confess his challenges to younger peers. I found Participant E's reluctance to open up about his challenges another possible contributory factor that could have hindered him from acquiring literacy skills. The possible pretence Participant E displayed in the focus group could have been the same during lectures, resulting in lecturers and peers assuming he had mastered the required competencies, yielding no further intervention from his lecturers nor assistance from his peers. Of concern is the sense of damage *("broken"; "useless"; "crushed")* and hopelessness *("never good enough"; "defeated"; "empty")* being expressed in the metaphor. If this view is indicative of first year students' university experiences, then tertiary institutions should consider ways to address the vulnerabilities being expressed. It is possible that some tertiary institutions and the persons working in them might not be aware of such cries for help.

Similarly, Participant B did not indicate in the focus group that she was struggling with academic writing as she had indicated in her literate life history. Perhaps she thought she did not need to say it anymore. However, it is possible that she was trying to impress me, her lecturer even though I had made participants aware of honesty. Participant B, like Participant E could have also been trying to make an impression on the other participants as the focus group was not as confidential as the literate life history. This view is reinforced by the findings of Gibbs (1997) who found that participants may not feel free to express some of the most sensitive issues in the presence of their peers, as focus groups may not be entirely confidential or anonymous.

In an attempt to narrate the participants' lived experiences of their literacy practices, I probed participants further during the focus group interactions about what they believed to have been the cause of their academic writing impediment and their responses included: "*Asiyazi thina lento*" which translates from isiZulu: "*We do not know this*" (Participant B). Participant B's response displayed a negative attitude toward academic writing and she appeared to have accepted the status quo which was that "*they*" did not know academic literacy. Perhaps Participant B's display of a negative attitude was an indication that she had been exposed to academic writing for the first time at a university of technology and had not adjusted. Her

negative attitude could have also been an indication of her failure to learn academic writing and her understanding that academic writing was difficult. Her utterance could also have been a yearning for help rather than a mere display of a negative attitude. She might also have been anxious as she had indicated that she had obtained a good mark in English in Grade 12 therefore, she probably worried that her performance could be in jeopardy. Participant B's statement indicated that she was not only speaking for herself, hence "*we*" but all eight participants, that they were not clear with "*this*" academic writing.

Participant G seemed to equate writing with spelling. "*My writing, mina ngishaywa ispelling nama tense*" which translates: "*My writing, my problem is spelling and tenses*" (Participant G). It is possible that the schools Participant G attended in the township, as revealed in her literate life history and focus group, could not assist her learn grammar. Additionally, this could mean Participant G's secondary schools did not emphasise writing as they did with speaking English, as noted by Participant G in the interview "*shame, bazama ukuthi si practize ukukhuluma iEnglish*" which translates "the teachers tried to encourage us to speak English". Participant G still remembered the activities that she and her school mates participated in orally, such as reading English newspapers, but could not account for a written activity, which revealed that her secondary school put more emphasis on reading English texts than writing. However, that Participant G noted that her struggle with spelling started from school and continued to university could be an indication that she did not receive adequate assistance from her school teachers. It is also possible that despite her teachers' attempts to help her speak and write in English, she did not take her work seriously. For instance, Participant G noted during the focus group that her teachers used to encourage them to speak English and would make use of class captains to report those who were speaking isiZulu at school, yet she admitted to have never paid attention nor attempted to practice the language. Of concern is that such policing and fear of speaking one's own home language could prove negative in learning a second language (Vygotsky, 1978).

It is also possible that the English teachers in her township schools were not proficient in English as it could have been their second or third language, and thus could not come up with dynamic strategies and activities of exposing learners to diversified literacy practices pertinent to learners' varied grades, as per the CAPS document. If this situation is true, it is in line with Kapp (2012) who found that poor language teaching by teachers is a result of their own limited English. However, it was clear, from her admission that Participant G's writing skills had

spelling and tenses difficulties which could jeopardise her academic performance. Participant G was aware that spelling and tenses are an integral part of academic writing thus, necessitating improvement on those grammatical components. She appeared unable to master the rules of English grammar, resulting in her writing difficulties. These findings are reinforced by the findings of Behrens *et al*. (2016) who found that various grammatical demands may pose difficulties, as error-free sentence construction may be difficult with the limited vocabulary of ESL students.

What I gleaned from the participants' experiences with their academic writing was that it remained a challenge for seven of them. These figures indicated a possibility that other ESL first year students' level of preparedness to meet the requirements of the universities' academic writing competence might not equal the expected level. Perhaps the reason for this lack of preparedness lies in the fact that English is a second language to all participants and they found it a challenge to master the conventions and competencies of academic writing. The lack of preparedness may also be a reflection of the fact that all participants were first year students who had not adapted to the new university literacies, which is in line with Tom *et al*.'s (2013) understanding that even though university students may possess proficiency in writing and speaking, academic writing remains complex, particularly for many first year ESL students.

4.2.2 Experiences with plagiarism and paraphrasing

The data from the literate life histories revealed that six out of eight participants (A, B, C, D, E and H) noted that they encountered challenges with paraphrasing and plagiarism. For instance, they noted: "*I have the following challenges: paraphrasing…*" (Participant A); "*Prof. always warns us to stop plagiarism…I don't really know how to write in my own words*" (Participant C); "*I run out of words to use for paraphrasing*" (Participant D); "*My lecturers always tell me I need to paraphrase and stop plagiarising…*" (Participant E); and "*Plagiarism sometimes happens*" (Participant B). These views were reinforced by participants A, D and F in the metaphor narratives as well: "*Plagiarism is my problem and references too, well, and other things*" (Participant A); *"…paraphrasing, hard"* (Participant D); and "*I sometimes plagiarise…paraphrasing is hard*" (Participant F).

What becomes clear is that participants do not fully understand what constitutes plagiarism and appear to lack paraphrasing skills, irrespective of their educational backgrounds. Participant H noted in his literate life history that teachers in the schools he attended

communicated mainly in IsiZulu, his mother tongue, which might have had a negative impact on his English vocabulary which is a requirement for paraphrasing. Participant F's lack of paraphrasing skills could be emanating from the relationship he had with his two English teachers as he never seemed to carry out their instruction completely. He probably got confused as one English teacher would discourage him from using "*bombastic*" expressions while the other encouraged the use of such words. Disagreement between his teachers on what constitutes good English might have resulted in his negative attitude to English as a whole, thus contributing to his limited vocabulary and consequently lack of paraphrasing skills. Perhaps the lack of paraphrasing competence faced by Participants F is indicative of the nature of township schools they attended. It seems likely that the teachers in these schools were ESL speakers who might not have possessed sufficient linguistic abilities, as is evident in some rural and township schools. If this is true, it is in line with the findings of Spaull (2013) who found that the effects of apartheid are still visible in some rural and township schools in South Africa in teachers who are not competent in English.

Even though Participant A attended English-medium schools she encountered challenges with plagiarism. Thus, while she could speak English fluently, she could not write academic English fluently, indicating that fluency in English language does not equal academic writing. Similarly, Participant D was exposed to English textbooks at home, prior to formal school instruction, went to English HL schools from pre-school to secondary school yet, she admitted that she encountered challenges with paraphrasing as she ran out of words. Participant D further noted in the focus group: "*there were times where I stole other people's ideas…I don't know how lecturers figure this out*". Participant D's statement indicated that she was aware that plagiarising was forbidden in the academia, as she was wilfully deceiving, hence the word 'stole'. It was evident that the student had not been made aware of how such practices could bring her academic career into disrepute and dent her academic image, and she probably did not realise what the consequences of her actions could be. This feedback suggests that some lecturers were vigilant during their marking of students' work, indicating quality assurance of standards at a university. On the other hand, carelessness could lower academic standards from those lectures who might not practice caution with regards to plagiarism. Participant D's act of plagiarism could have been a result of lecturers' lack of instruction to students on plagiarism and consequently inadequate exposure to tasks aimed at exposing students to paraphrasing, crucial to work free from plagiarism. If this view is true, it is line with the findings of Shi (2012) and Li and Casanave (2012) who found that lecturers need to devote more time to

teaching students to quote, summarise, and paraphrase source information in order to prevent plagiarism.

Participant D indicated that English language was not a problem for her, as she had been exposed to the language at the home through reading English books, as seen in her artefact below. The narration to her metaphor (below) read: "*That lady is white but I identify with her…I speak English with an English accent.*" It became clear that Participant D had a confused identity as she was trying to be something she was not. It further revealed a possibility that she placed more value on a European language as opposed to her African language thus devaluing her own literacies. Perhaps her seemingly confused identity was indicative of her upbringing. Her parents appeared to have made her believe English was more important than IsiZulu hence her exposure to English literature in the home prior to formal instruction. Additionally, this could depict the role of class, status and power that English language enjoys amongst some parents as evidenced by the findings of Kajee (2011) who found that some ESL parents are willing to compromise their children's identity and performance in favour of English, as English is deemed a language of economy and dominion. On the other hand, Participant D's parents could have been ensuring that their child gets early exposure to English to advantage her academic career, as English is a language of instruction from grade 5 in many South African schools. This view is in line with the findings of Vygotsky (1997) and Rose (2004) who found that children's early exposure to English-rich literacies from the home better prepares them for English literacy practices at school. Participant D also noted: "*I sometimes get tired to paraphrase when there are many assignments*". Perhaps this could be explained by Participant D's choice of metaphor and consequently the narration as she narrated: "*I feel overwhelmed with the amount of work here...there's too much hard work, I end up failing to balance my modules, I leave everything halfway*". There is a possibility that Participant D's frustration is about more than plagiarism and paraphrasing, but coping with the quantity of work at the university as her metaphor suggests. The feelings of being inundated and exhausted ("*overwhelmed*") by the work and demands at a university by all students, but particularly first year students, appear to make them resort to unsound literacy practices such a plagiarism, and when a language deficit is included, the problem is compounded.
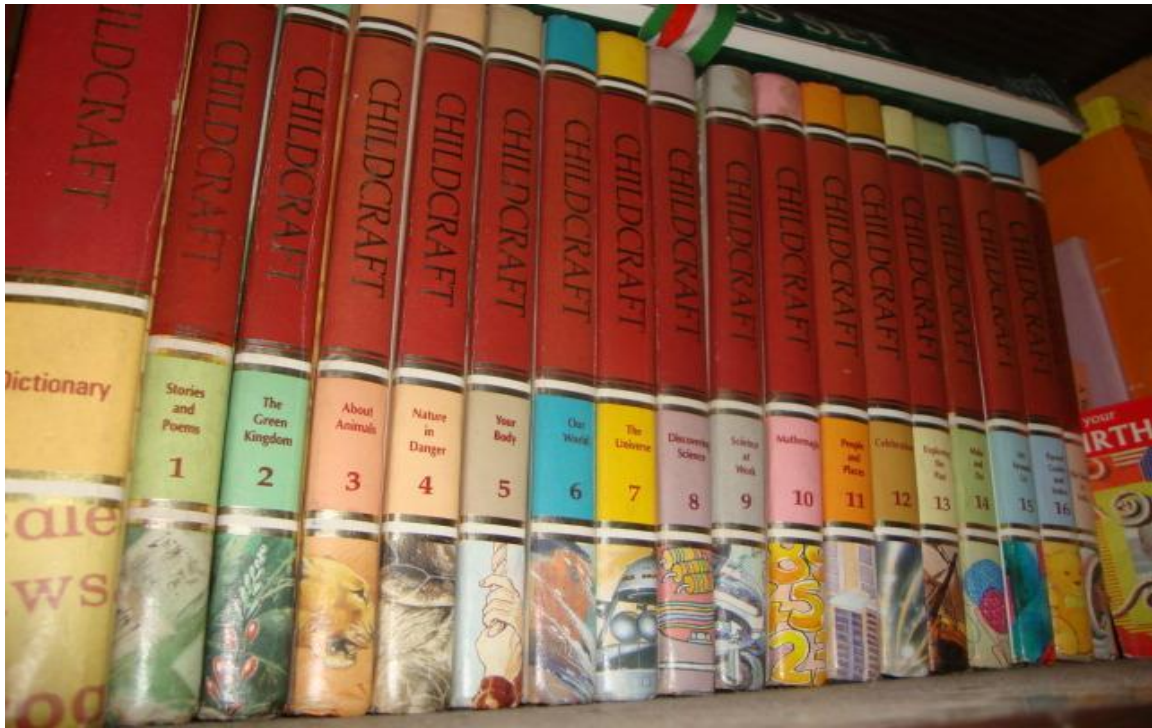
Participant D's artefact

Participant D's metaphor

The picture is of a young white lady who has open books on the table with her face on a book while wearing her reading glasses. Behind her are bookshelves which could suggest she

is in a library. While Participant D sees herself in the picture, her early literacy practices seemed to have not equipped her for her later literacy practices. It becomes evident that the medium of instruction is not necessarily going to assist students entering universities. The literacies at university are different to those encountered at school. The participant is probably overwhelmed by the amount of reading at the UoT. All the books are open which could be symptomatic of a lack of time, or time management and the possibility that one assignment required her to read many books, something she had not adjusted to as it was her first year at the UoT. In addition, this situation could have been worsened by the fact that high school reading is different from university reading, necessitating certain competencies associated with reading for academic purposes that the participant might have not yet mastered; this is reinforced by the findings of Boakye *et al*. (2014) who found that ESL students enter institutions of higher learning lacking academic reading skills due to under-preparedness.

Participant E, who had also been to English-medium schools from pre-school to secondary school, alluded to a different reason behind his inability to avoid plagiarism in his academic work, as noted during the focus group: "*the only problem I am facing with plagiarism, we don't understand the whole concept*". I noticed that participants A, B, C, F, G and H nodded their heads. When I inquired if they shared the same sentiments, they responded: "*Yes*". Participant E elaborated as he noted: "*Lento iyaxabana ngoba bafike basitshele nge plagiarism kodwa masesibhala amatest bafuna into e exact*", which translates to "*this is in conflict with what lecturers teach us, they do not want us to plagiarize for academic writing but when we write tests they want us to memorize word for word from the book*". This experience is worrying at a tertiary institution as it could be indicative of a lack of original thinking and critical thought; it could therefore give rise to suspicion that lecturers could just be mouthing sentiments about plagiarism but promoting rote learning and memorisation. It was a possibility that lecturers might have not clearly agreed amongst themselves on what constitutes plagiarism thus leading to a lack of clarity on the concept and the definition. Perhaps lecturers themselves were not clear on how to equip participants with paraphrasing skills as they might have felt they were not English or Communication Module specialists. Participants could have lacked summary writing skills and lecturers might have not taught them the difference between quoting, summarising and plagiarism and the relationship between these. These findings are reinforced by those of Li and Casanave (2012), Pecorari and Shaw (2012) and Petric (2012), who found that lack of clear instruction from lecturers to students on paraphrasing, quoting and summarising yields plagiarism. These findings also resonate with the findings of Turuk (2008)

who found that while scaffolding may yield educational benefits for students through a teacher who understands the content, imparting this knowledge to students, a lack of content comprehension yields confusion in scaffolding and consequently impacts students' comprehension negatively.

4.2.3 Experiences with note taking

Even though Participants E, F and G made no mention of note taking as an obstacle, five participants indicated that note taking was a challenge. This view is evident from the participants' responses from their literate life histories when they note that: "*This note taking is not easy!*" (Participant, B); and "*I have the following challenges: ...Note taking...*" (Participant A). Such sentiment was reiterated during the focus group as Participant C noted "*I'm struggling with note taking*" and in metaphors of Participants D and H.

Participant H's metaphor

Participant H's metaphor was a picture of a hand in the middle of the deep blue sea. Only the fingers are visible. The picture and narrative indicated that the participant was drowning in

the sea which represented academic literacy or the UoT. Like the clear, blue sea, which looks good but is dangerous if someone cannot swim, so is academic literacy to someone who does not comprehend. Participant H's narration of his metaphor included: "*Me drowning at university…academic writing rules confusing…note taking…I need help!*" The possibility that the person was sinking suggested that the participant was in serious trouble and needed urgent rescuing.

Participant D noted a challenge in "*Taking notes on my own*" and Participant H "*I have the following challenges…note taking...*" Participants A, B, C and H cited inability to cope with lecturers' pace as they moved from one transparency or slide to the next during lectures and thus fail to copy notes. This situation is made worse because they were attempting to engage with their second language as well. Participants A, B, C and H possibly have not mastered the skill of note taking, such as the use of shorthand, as note taking does not necessitate a mere copying of words. It is possible that participants did not learn note taking skills from high school and university, resulting in their lack of note making and note taking skills. Perhaps this lack of note taking skill could be indicative of one of the new literacy realities at the university that participants A, B, C, and H might have not adapted to; it could also indicate that the university is not putting measures in place to mediate their literacy development. The lack of appropriate mediation by the university with regard to note taking competencies might prove negative to some participants' cognitive development in this regard; this view is affirmed by Vygotsky (1978) who found that mediation is required for students' cognitive development.

It is also possible that participants A, B, C and H possessed limited vocabulary as ESL speakers. If these findings are true, they could be in line with the findings of Dukhan, Cameron and Brenner (2016) who found that note construction for ESL first year students often were of poor quality due to their limited vocabulary. If Participants A and B lacked vocabulary even though they had been to English HL schools, this could mean the schools they attended failed to put them at an advantage in terms of English, which is in contradiction with the finding of Rose (2004) who found that the school learners attend plays a role in learners' language development.

Participant D had a different concern to note taking, which was a concern about her inability to construct notes on her own; this suggests that Participant D was keen on attempting to work independently, beyond the confines of the lecture walls thereby formulating her own

notes, a practice encouraged at a university. However, Participant D's admission in her literate life history that "*Vocabulary is sometimes a problem*" and consequently *"Maybe it's because at home we speak IsiZulu*" pointed to a possibility that English language vocabulary for ESL speaking university students may not be sufficient for note construction and other literacy practices at a university. Participant D attributed her lack on competency in note construction on her home language, yet, when I asked if she was able to take notes in IsiZulu, she revealed she was also struggling in her vernacular language, as she was only used to speaking her language but not writing in IsiZulu. It is possible that Participant D's linguistic and discipline identity had influenced her personal and cultural identity, resulting in her striving to excel mainly in her second language, while neglecting her first language, although it appears that she was not excelling in either. In addition, the fact that her parents exposed her to English literature at a young age, at home, prior to formal instruction from the school, indicated the influence her parents could have played in promoting a second language as opposed to a first language in their child. Perhaps this could be indicative of some middle class and professional parental linguistic preferences for their children as they may consider English a language of wealth, status and power. This view is in line with the findings of Kajee (2011) who states that that some parents regard English as a language of economy and dominion and therefore prefer that their children attend English-medium schools. On the other hand, Participant D's behaviour of attempting to assimilate the new university identity thereby abandoning her own world, yet not perfectly fitting in either world, could be an indication that literacies need a new meaning which will define literacies beyond conventional definition of literal reading and writing by educational institutions. This new description of literacy should begin to consider possibilities of multiple interpretations of information rooted in people's own cultural, linguistic and social symbols in order to make sense to ESL students. This view is reinforced by the findings of Sailors, Martinez, Treviño, Stortz, Davis, Jones and Van Cura Monaco (2018) who found that expanding the landscape of literacy is a necessity, as children tend to use their cultural or environmental metaphors, temporality, imagery and symbolism to give meaning to texts. Perhaps the perennial concern of universities regarding students' inability to read and write, might be addressed if they considered the options of various interpretations of information located within students' cultural, linguistic and social contexts, which will require universities to consider literacy differently.

4.2.4 Experiences with referencing and citation

Two of the eight participants (A and H) struggled with referencing, which is evident from the participants' responses from their literate life histories when they note that "*I have the following challenges: sometimes referencing*" (Participant A); and "*These areas of literacy challenge me now…references…*" (Participant H). This view was reinforced by Participant H from the metaphor narrative as he noted "*Confusing…references*" (Participant H). It is possible that participants A and H have not been guided by their lecturers on referencing as their lecturers may believe it is not their responsibility to teach these competencies. On the one hand, the fact that only two participants indicated a challenge with referencing could be an indication that lecturers might have taught participants the appropriate referencing techniques yet, participants A and H could still be unclear as they were trying to cope with other literacy competencies. The realisation of referencing as a challenge by Participants A and H and the noting thereof suggests that both participants were aware that inappropriate referencing compromised their academic writing, and they understood that keeping track of sources or references is an essential component of academic writing, as asserted by Irvin (2010).

Two of the eight participants (C and E) struggled with citing sources, which was evident from their metaphors as they noted "*I still struggle with citing sources*" (Participant C); and "*Citing sources is also a challenge*" (Participant E). Participant C's metaphor was a picture of grey clouds and a storm with some white cloud and a light on the left corner. The words "*STORMS DON'T LAST FOREVER*" appeared on the picture with a large font.

Participant C's metaphor

Those words above indicated a voice of hope that current challenging literacy practices will not last forever. These words were bold and white against the black background that is the dark storm. This depicted the optimism of the participant who could acknowledge that academic literacy was a challenge but hoped for the better, with time, which was demonstrated by the light and a white cloud on the side. The fact that both the light and the white cloud were on top, indicated how success driven and optimistic the participant was of literacy practices with proper intervention.

What I gleaned from Participant C's comment was a possibility that participants had been exposed to citation of sources by their lecturers hence Participant C's use of "still", when she said "*I still struggle with citing sources*"; this could be further explained by the fact that only participants C and E noted a challenge in this regard of the eight participants. "Lecturers tell us to go to the Librarians so they can teach us to cite but the problem is that we get assignments at about the same time as other students and by the time I book for the librarians' assistance, either the queue is too long or time is not enough!" (Participant C). Participant C's comment could be an indication that lecturers did not teach citation of sources in class. Perhaps the reason why lecturers might have not taught participants referencing was due to time constraints as they needed to catch up with the syllabus. Lecturers could have also felt no need to teach

participants referencing as that could have been the librarians' responsibility. Perhaps lecturers themselves were not clear on referencing, thus could not teach it. Additionally, that Participant C appeared concerned about the librarians' inability to guide all participants on time, could be an indication of inadequate human resources at the UoT, where the study was conducted, and the impact that it had on participants' literacy practices. It could also indicate the student's lack of planning to go for help on something she does not understand before the 'rush' when an assignment comes in. Furthermore, the students actively sought out mediation of their literacy practices but could not get it. They were developing agency internally and trying to get help but they could not obtain assistance from external social interactions with the librarian. Citation of sources, like referencing, is a crucial aspect of academic writing. These findings are reinforced by those of Li and Casanave (2012), Pecorari and Shaw (2012) and Petric (2012) who found that lecturers needed to teach students quoting and citing sources amongst others.

4.2.5 Experiences with reading

The data from the metaphors indicated that five of the eight participants (A, D, F, G and H) noted that they encountered challenges with reading. Participant G's metaphor was a picture and the word "Emergency" was written on the red notice board with a white arrow pointing to the hospital. Outside the hospital was an ambulance.

Participant G's metaphor

This picture indicated that the participant felt she needed urgent assistance where university literacies were concerned. The use of such a picture indicated that her academic work or literacy was important to her, which was why struggling could cost her health. Her work was her life therefore she could not afford academic challenges. The red colour in the picture was a sign alerting that danger had approached or was approaching. While literacy practices might have affected her overall health or well-being, the participant knew that with good intervention, she could be rescued, hence the hospital.

Participants noted: "*...a lot of books daily at university and they are hard to understand*" (Participant A); "*Even reading is another problem because I must try and understand the difficult English words they use*" (Participant G); "*Academic reading, writing and thinking challenge me a lot!*" (Participant F); and "*There's just too much hard work... academic reading*" (Participant D). Such opinions were reinforced by participants (A, B, D, E, F and H) in the focus group as well, as they noted: "*One of my problems is....read*" (Participant A); and "*ne (and) reading is hard.*" (Participant H). Participants' comments revealed a possibility of linguistic deficit in terms of their reading abilities, hence the use of either "*hard*" or "*difficult*". Perhaps this could be explained by the fact that university literacies may require in-depth comprehension of the English language that participants might not possess as they had not adapted to the new university environment, as they were first year students. The view could also indicate that the university literacies are not adequately scaffolded by lecturers, a requirement espoused by Vygotsky (1980); it also suggests that the gap between secondary school literacies and university literacy practices have not been bridged, resulting in under prepared, confused students. If these findings are true, they could be in line with those of Boakye *et al.* (2014) who found that ESL first year university students' lack of academic reading competence sees them entering universities underprepared.

Participants' comments (Participants B, D and E) from the focus group revealed another dimension to their reading difficulties as they noted: "*There is quite a lot to read too*" (Participant E); "*I have to read a lot now*" (Participant D); and "*to read more*" (Participant B). It appears the quantity of reading material could contribute to participants' frustration with reading. Possibly, the quantity of reading at school was significantly less than at university, which this could indicate that participants' reading pace had not advanced to meet the expected

volume of tertiary work. Therefore, a possibility could be that with time spent at the university characterised by habitual reading and consequently new vocabulary acquisition, participants' reading skills could improve. These findings are reinforced by those of Chokwe (2011) who found that in order for students to be more prepared for reading, they need to read more as reading and writing are essential in different disciplines. This view is in line with findings of Vygotsky (1978) who found that the Zone of Proximal development entails a process where the learner acquires knowledge over time under the guidance of the teacher.

The choice of appropriate books to read, as opposed to just reading per se, adds to reading challenges. This view is evident from Participant A's comments as noted in the literate life history where she notes: "*I have the following challenges: choosing good books to read*" (Participant A). While Participant A might have been the only participant to note choice of relevant reading material, as her obstacle, it could be a costly handicap to reading. Participant A's problem could emanate from the nature of teenagers' choice of reading that may be far from reading for academic purposes. This reading challenge could also be a manifestation of Participant A's anxiety as a first year university student who might have not familiarised herself with academic texts. On the other hand, this could mean that the lecturers have not guided Participant A and possibly other participants on how to search for and locate articles, books and journals amongst other things in order to enrich participants' reading skills. Perhaps lecturers are not keen on teaching participants reading and reading related competencies as they assume participants entered the university with the relevant competence prerequisites – lecturers might assume that participants enter the university with the certain literacies in place. These findings are reinforced by those of Kapp (2012), Carstens (2011) and Wildsmith-Cromarty and Steinke (2014) who found that because the expectation is that students would have developed the required level of reading skill at school, lecturers at university do not generally focus on developing reading skills.

4.2.6 Experiences with academic English

Seven out of eight participants (A, C, D, E, F, G and H) noted from their metaphor narratives that English at university was challenging. A participant noted "*English they use to write is not easy*" (Participant A). When I inquired who the participant meant by "t*hey*", her response was "*lecturers*". "*I speak English well but university is not about speaking only... English not easy... [it's] hard*" (Participants E). This view is reinforced by seven of the eight participants (B, C, D, E, F, G and H) in the literate life histories, as well as three who noted:

"*It is a problem to understand English very well*" (Participant C); "*The language here, is too formal*" (Participant D); and "*The level of English here is too hard!*" (Participant F). In the metaphor narratives, Participant B did not reflect this finding, yet in the literate life history, Participant B reflected it. Perhaps Participant B had not been careful enough to realise that her storyline needed to demonstrate consistency, or it might have been an oversight. Participants D and E seemed to believe that the level of English at a university appears to be different from the English in secondary schools thus, yielding linguistic challenges. Yet, participants D and E grew up in literacy rich environments, had exposure to reading and writing in English prior to formal school instruction, attended well-resourced, former Model C preschools, primary and secondary schools, with teachers who were possibly better qualified. They were most likely to have acquired and achieved good linguistic competencies, which is not the case. While Vygotsky (1978) found that learners' early experiences such as environment and school are instrumental to ESL and EFL learners' literacy practices at school and academic performance in the later years, it is clear that university literacies still need to engage in explicit teaching and scaffolding.

What participant D could be implying by "hard English" is the level of academic English at a university compared to school English; this possibly means there is difference between English taught in secondary schools and academic English at a university. Academic English may be more than just the English language, as it is discipline-orientated. These findings are reinforced by those of van Schalkwyk, Bitzer, and van der Walt (2010), who found that academic literacy entails ability to speak, read and write within a particular discipline's conventions.

In contrast to Participants D and E, participants C, F, G and H may have grounds to deem academic English a challenge as they had been exposed to township and rural schools where some teachers might not have displayed sophistication in terms of English language competence, and consequently might have an inability to impart the required literacy competencies to learners thus, impacting learners' university literacies in the later years. These findings are reinforced by those of Spaull (2013) who found that apartheid has robbed South African township and rural schools of quality teaching and learning, yielding academically underprepared students flooding the universities. Additionally, the possibility of failure to execute the expected linguistic and literacy competencies in some rural and township schools due to underqualified teachers, could be indicative of the DoE's inefficiency in equipping

teachers with necessary skills to teach English. Even though teachers, according to the CAPS document, are expected to attend workshops throughout the year on the latest teaching methodologies pertaining to the language or content subjects they teach (DoE, 2011), it is possible that much more intensive assistance and constant moderation might be required.

Participants A and B first attended preschools in rural schools where they were taught in their vernacular, IsiZulu, then attended former Indian schools from primary school to secondary school. The fact that participants A and B also encountered challenges having attended former Indian schools where English was the medium of instruction may suggest that, even though both participants might have appeared to be at an advantage with English language comprehension, the vocabulary and English learnt here might not have been sufficient to prepare them for university literacies. If this understanding is true, it is in line with the findings of Fleisch (2008), who found that shifting learners from a vernacular to a second language during early years of school may interfere with learners' reading abilities across the curriculum.

It becomes clear that fluency in English as a language does not equal mastery of academic English competencies. Furthermore, secondary school literacies do not fully prepare learners for higher education literacy practices. These findings are reinforced by the findings of Papashane and Hlalele (2014) who found that first year university students may bring with them practices that may or may not be considered appropriate for universities.

4.2.7 Experiences with lecturers' teaching skills
4.2.7.1 Lecturers' reluctance to teach academic literacy

The data from the literate life histories indicated that four of the eight participants (B, D, E and G) noted that they encountered challenges emanating from lecturers' reluctance to teach academic literacy. For example, participants noted: "*Lecturers tend to assume we know academic literacy because other than Communication Module, we do not really get to details of academic literacy*" (Participant B); and "*Lecturers tell us to think critically but don't teach us how to*" (Participant D). This opinion was reinforced by Participants D, E and G in the focus group as well, who noted: "*Lecturers are thinking that we already know these thing[s] and we don't*" (Participant D); and "*Mina Ma'am honestly, ngidinga usizo*" which translates to "*Me, I need help*" (Participant G). It appeared that the participants, as first year students at the university, had expected to be taught academic literacy. That Participant D notes that the "*Communication Module*" as the only module where participants are taught academic literacy

could be an indication that one module was not sufficient to expose participants to academic literacy practices. It is also possible that some lecturers might not have taught any form of academic literacy or they might not be qualified or have knowledge to teach academic literacy. It does appear that lecturers need to intervene, and teach participants academic literacy, as this lack of instruction affected their academic performance. These findings are reinforced by Chokwe (2011), who found that academic staff needs to teach students academic writing skills even though these competencies might require language specialists.

However, there could also be confusion among participants when lecturers fail to agree amongst themselves what constitutes academic literacy. Participant E commented during the interview: "*.....in Tourism Module you can't like write something and say it's towards the thing, it has to be exactly same thing*". In other words, they have to regurgitate lecturers' notes, a practice that goes against academic writing. It is possible that inadequate human resources may restrain lecturers from conducting lectures per discipline, even though academic writing could be discipline-orientated. Time constraints could also be a factor with regard to allocating time for academic literacy. However, it would seem some lecturers are aware of a need for participants to acquire these university literacies hence, "*posting notes on blackboard*", as noted by Participant D, although Participant C noted "*It is hard to be my own teacher*". It is also possible that lecturers do not enable students' academic growth. In addition, lecturers might have assumed participants brought with them the minimum required literacy competencies from secondary school. These findings are reinforced by the findings of McKenna (2010), who found that lecturers often label first year students as underprepared for the university literacies. Considering the existing gap between the school literacies and the university literacies, perhaps all institutions of learning from school level to tertiary institutions should acknowledge and incorporate learners' linguistic and cultural diversity within both the school and the university curriculum in order for the taught content to make sense to learners, thus empowering them to be better prepared for academic literacy. Such a view is reinforced by Gutiérrez (2008) who found that the schooling system and institutions of higher learning need to cease to dissociate school literacy from learners' social literacies.

4.2.7.2 Lecturers' pace during lectures
Evidence from literate life histories revealed that two of the eight participants (C and E) felt lecturers were either too fast or did not thoroughly explain the content. For example, participants noted: "*enye into ebashayayo* [the problem with lecturers] *is that their approach*

is usually that she is learned and akana [does not have] *patience for younger people*" (Participant E); "*Also, they are very fast when they speak*" (Participant C). A lack of understanding from the participants could be an indication that participants were anxious as they had only spent one semester at the university and thus might not have adjusted to both university literacies and how lecturers lecture. The participants reflected that "*I think as time goes on, we will begin to understand what is happening*" (Participant B); and "*Let me just say, we still getting used to the system*" (Participant B). Participant B's comments could be attesting to the fact that she was optimistic that with time, she would be able to adjust and consequently understand lecturers. These findings are reinforced by the findings of Dukhan *et al*. (2016) who found that ESL students' literacies do improve with time spent at a university.

4.2.8 Experiences with academic literacy as a whole

The data from metaphors indicated that all eight participants noted that they encountered challenges with academic literacy; this was evident from metaphors and brief narratives participants chose to represent their university literacy practices. These metaphors included the following:
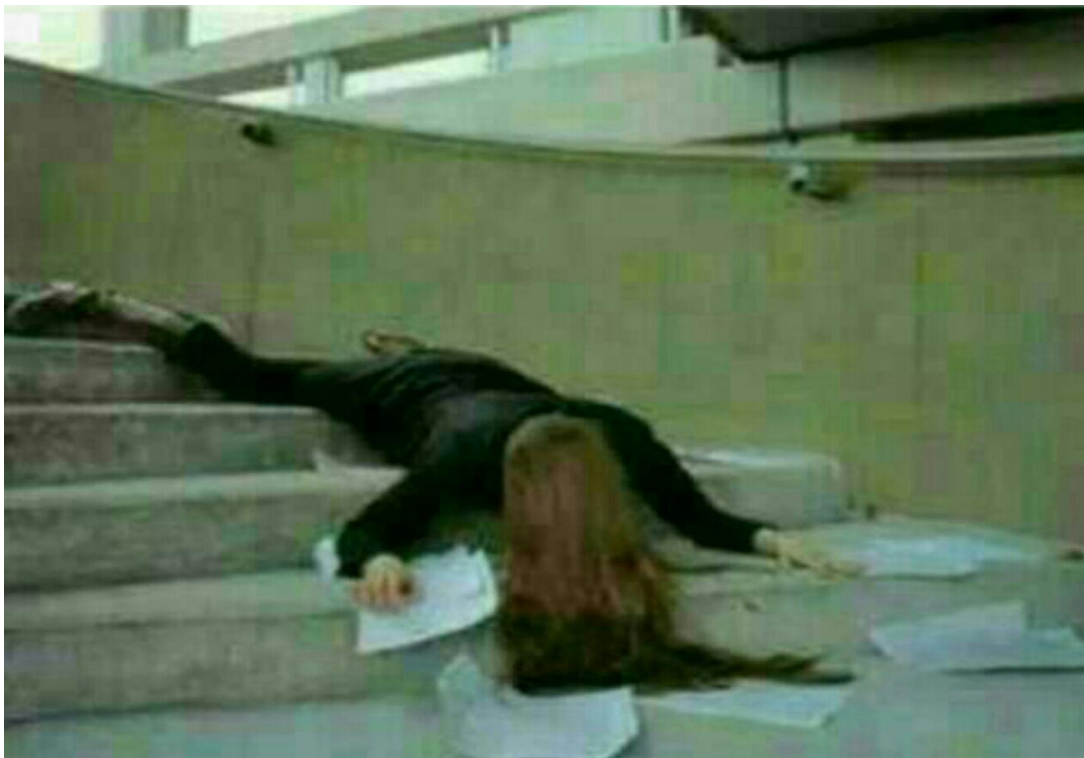
Participant A's metaphor

"That [is] me, fallen because I'm exhausted. I carry a lot of books daily at university and they are hard to understand..." (Participant A). In this picture, a young white lady wearing smart black clothes has fallen on her face just as she was walking down the steps. There are papers around her. To me, these look like articles the participant has read or still needs to read. The volume of work at university, and the challenge she encounters with regard to academic literacy are part of her fall; this could be a sign that the participant is exhausted or not coping, thus requiring assistance, even though she might be taking her work seriously. Participant A's choice of what appears to be black clothes could suggest the esteem she has for her academic work, and the feelings of heaviness, from exhaustion. Her metaphor could therefore be a cry for help from her lecturers.

It is possible that lecturers are not aware that she is not coping with her academic work, or there is a possibility that lecturers have exposed her to voluminous work as a requirement for the university. That Participant A has fallen, speaks of a possible gap that exists between the school and the university literacies, yielding fatigue or challenges. Perhaps Participant A lacks the ability to manage her time in order to balance her academic work. Another possibility is that since, it is her first year at a UoT, she has not adapted to the university literacies. What becomes clear is that some form of intervention from the university is needed in order to assist some first year students who could find themselves in a similar predicament. Of note, is that the picture depicts the person still on the ground after falling; this is a reflection of the participant seeing herself as still being unable to stand on her two feet, as being incapable of coping.

Participants B and H, in the literate life history, commented: *"I must sweat for a mark, mind you, every module I do requires that I apply academic literacy skills, something I have not really mastered at this point"* (Participant B); *"How do I feel about academic literacy? It is not easy at all and I really do feel like I am sinking or drowning"* (Participant H); and Participant A, C, D had similar sentiments. Participants E, F and G noted in their metaphors that they encountered challenges with academic literacy but failed to mention the same factor in their literate life histories; this could have been as a result of the literacy practices changing over time. Metaphors were submitted as the first source of data and the literate life history was the third data generation strategy. Perhaps Participants E, F and G's literacies improved with time. On the other hand, it could be that they felt there was no need for them to mention what they had already mentioned previously in their metaphors; it could have also been an oversight

from the three participants as their literate life histories needed to provide a timeline from their early literacies to their current literacies. Considering the fact that, all eight participants disclosed during the interviews that academic literacy remained or presented a challenge, in one way or the other, could counteract the possibility of a change of their plot from their literate life histories, as the focus groups was the fourth data generation source. Perhaps Participants E, F and G's inconsistency is reflective of their confusion with regard to academic practices.

Generally, the participants' comments indicated that academic literacy was a challenge, and they seemed to be aware that lecturers could assist them. The varied nature of metaphors seemed to have a common thread namely: challenges with academic literacy at the UoT. Perhaps these challenges emanated from the fact that participants had not adjusted to the university literacies. Lack of adjustment by participants to the new university literacies could be indicative of participants' under-preparedness with regard to academic literacy. Furthermore, the possibility of participants' under-preparedness could be an indication of the secondary school literacies which might have influenced participants' ability to acquire the new literacies. These findings are reinforced by the findings of Cliff and Hanslo (2009) who determined that what students learn in school either prepares or under-prepares them for university. However, the fact that all participants noted in the focus group and the interview that academic literacy posed a challenge, including participants D and E who attended former Model C schools and participants A and C who attended English-medium schools, indicated that exposure to an English-medium school alone, does not ensure academic literacy competencies as university literacies require specific competencies. However, early literacies might enable the acquisition of later literacies more easily than if there had not been adequate exposure to early literacies. This finding is in line with the findings of Rose (2004) and Vygotsky (1978) who found that the learner's early environment determines the learner's literacy capabilities in the later year.

4.3 Theme Two: English Second Language first year students' past literacy practices and how they enable and/ or constrain their current literacy practices

4.3.1 The influence of HLE
4.3.1.1 Parental education, family's socioeconomic status and first exposure to literacy

Categories and Participants	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Total
Brought up by biological parents: mother and father	1	1	1	1	1				5
Brought up by a single parent/ guardian						1			1
Orphan (s)							1	1	2
Professional parent(s)		1		1	1				3
Unemployed parent(s)			1						1
Literate parent(s)/ guardian in IsiZulu only	1				1			1	3
Literate parent(s)/ guardian(s) in English		1		1	1				3
Exposed to English literacy in the home		1	1	1	1		1		5
Exposed to IsiZulu literacy in the home								1	1
Taught to read/and write in the home	1	1	1	1	1				5

Table on Participants' early literacy environment as revealed by the artefacts, LLHs and the Focus group

The above table reveals that six participants were brought up by their biological parents (Participants A, B, C, D, E and G) while Participant F was brought up by a guardian and Participant H, was an orphan brought up by a relative. Only four participants (B, C, D and E) of the eight have professional parents, literate in English with average income. Three participants' (A, E and H) parents are literate in IsiZulu only. Five participants (B, C, D, E and G) were exposed to English literacy in the home, while participant H was only exposed to IsiZulu literacy in the home. Five participants (A, B, C, D and E) revealed that they were taught to read and write in the home.

The data from the literate life histories indicated that four of the eight participants (A, B, D, and E) noted that the home literacy environment prepared them for school literacy and

consequently university literacies. For example, they noted: "*Reading before I went to school helped me. Got me ready for school and varsity*" (Participant B); "*Reading before going to school actually made ready for school. I believe that's why I never had problems with English at school and later at varsity*" (Participant D); and "*I was I introduced to the English vocabulary with singing crèche songs and learning the basics of identifying pictures and alphabets. Looking back, I was fortunate to go to Model C schools just for good English, that's why I am better performing at varsity although it's not my best*" (Participant E). This view was reinforced by two participants (B and D) in their artefacts' narratives as they noted: "*These books helped before I entered the school system, before I went to preschool. My mother used to read them to us. They also helped to prepare for school and later*" (Participant D). Her artefact is a picture with the colourful, well organised collection of children's English books on a shelf for younger children, before the school going age (see section 4.2.2 above). What the artefact symbolised was that Participant D was exposed to English literacy in the home before receiving formal instruction from the school. In addition, it reflected that Participant D had an English linguistic advantage which better prepared her for preschool and consequently school and university. Furthermore, the colourful nature of the books and the order in which they were arranged was indicative that the books were interesting to children and exposed them to the necessary life skills.

Participant B's artefact was a picture of young learners in a classroom. All learners looked clean, healthy and were smiling. They were standing in their classroom. Their hands were raised as though they all wanted to respond to their teacher's question. The classroom looked well maintained with clean white walls, tiled floor and clean windows. What the picture told me was that learners enjoyed and loved their school environment and they understood their teacher. Additionally, the school environment was conducive for teaching and learning. The picture further suggested that learners had fun with their primary school literacies hence, smiles. Perhaps the reason behind the learners' smiles was because they understood their teacher(s) therefore loved or enjoyed primary school literacy. Perhaps Participant B's choice of her artefact was a depiction of the joy and excitement she had for school as she had learnt to read and write her name before going to school thus being better preparing her for school instruction. The fact that all learners looked remarkably clean and healthy indicated they probably came from homes that could provide them with good food and sanitation. The state of their school revealed that the school governing body and/or government looked after the school well.

Participant B's artefact

Participants seemed to realise the role their home literacy environment played with regard to preparation for formal school instruction. Participant D noted she was exposed to English literacy prior to school by her middle income parents, hence "*My mom was a school teacher. Her and my dad are professionals*", which indicated that the participant saw a link between socioeconomic status or level of parental education and the choice of literacy exposure for the children. For instance, Participant D's mother was a teacher therefore she was probably better equipped with English teaching strategies that resulted in Participant D's interest in books. In addition, the fact that Participant D's parents had an average income, might have made it possible for them to afford the books they exposed her to. Additionally, the fact that both the participant's parents earned average incomes allowed them to afford of former Model C school fees.

Participant B as well, appeared certain that reading from the home prepared her for her later literacies. There is an implication that Participant B was exposed to English print hence she

noted never having had problems with English at university. Participant B also noted from her artefact that she learnt "*to read and write my name from my mom*". Participant D and B's comments revealed that parental role plays a determining factor with regard to literacies of their children prior to school literacy. These findings are in line with those of Antilla (2013) who found that the child's overall literacy development and readiness for school is shaped by the child's parents who become the first teachers. Thus, parents play a fundamental role, as their involvement determines the children's preparedness for formal instruction and subsequently influences the literary success throughout their secondary and tertiary education.

Participant E's mention of the type of school he attended (a Model C School) in the artefact, literate life history and focus group indicated he was probably aware of the literacy advantages former Model C Schools possessed. However, Participant E seems to realise that a good English background from crèche, might not equate to success with academic literacy at the university, although it is an advantage. Participant C noted in the focus group that "*I do wish I had a chance to go to a multiracial school. Students who went to this schools speak good English*". It is clear that Participant C noted the influence of school literacy practices on the university literacy practices and thus felt disadvantaged as she had attended township schools. Participant C could be representing those students whose background or upbringing influenced their academic literacy negatively. Participant C was brought up by an elderly relative who might not have been literate in English and who was unemployed as noted from her literate life history, "*I sometimes feel like quitting university but I keep reminding myself that I must get a good job and support my siblings*" (Participant C). It is clear that this participant, and possibly many others like her, bear the weight of responsibility to improve the lives of her family. It is possible that the reason Participant C would feel like quitting university might stem from literacy challenges she encounters at the university as evident in her literate life history: "*I did not do well in English literature and History*". Perhaps Participant C's poor performance in English and History stemmed from the literacy practices she was exposed to in the home, prior to primary school, as noted in her literate life history: "*These were IsiZulu tales*". While participant C's exposure to IsiZulu in the home was appropriate considering it is her mother tongue, the fact that she went to a 'rural' primary school where the medium of instruction was mainly IsiZulu, could have put her at a disadvantage with regard to literacy practices at the university where English is the medium of instruction. Furthermore, getting introduced to the English language as a medium of instruction from Grade 4, might have been late for Participant C to acquire adequate English vocabulary. These findings are reinforced by the findings of

Fleisch (2008) who found that exposing learners to a second language as late as grade 4 is detrimental to learners' reading, writing and numeracy and may hamper learners' proficiency in reading across the board.

Participants F and H seemed confused with regard to the definition of literacy, even though I had explained it to them prior to their participation as I read the content of the consent form both in English and IsiZulu that basic literacy referred to the ability to read and write in any language. When I enquired from Participants F and H during the interviews why they did not relate their literacies in the home to their artefact and literate life history, they noted "*My grandmother only spoke IsiZulu*" (Participant H) and "*The only time I spoke English was school*" (Participant F). I then had to explain to them that they were allowed to refer to IsiZulu literacy practices such as the conversations they might have had with their parents or parental figures, peers and neighbours amongst others. Furthermore, the games they might have played with their friends where they spoke a language including singing, poetry or listening to music whether on television or from their environment fitted within the definition of literacy. Participant H noted "*Ma'am, kuyezwakala, ukuthi abanye bebesho izinto abazenze in English*" which translates "*Ma'am, I understand, it's just that other participants were only mentioning English literacy practices*". "*Mina Ma'am bengithi ufuna isiNgisi sodwa*" which translates "*Me Ma'am, I thought you wanted English only*". I had to remind them what I had told them at the beginning of the research and throughout field text collection as I had been encouraging them to speak in a language that will allow them to better tell their stories. I further explained that most participants during the interviews communicated their experiences in both IsiZulu and English because they spoke from the heart through a language better understood by them, as all I wanted were genuine stories. Participant F smiled, nodded his head and noted "*Okay Ma'am*". I then asked if he needed to add on the nature of early literacy activities he got exposed to in the home prior to formal schooling and his response was "*It was just ukudlala nezinye izingane ngesiZulu and really Ma'am angisakhumbuli kahlehle, ngikhumbula kakhulu eskoleni*" which translates to "*It was just to play with other children in IsiZulu and really Ma'am I can't remember well, all I remember was what we did at school*". What I inferred from Participants F and H is the possibility that they did not value their own IsiZulu literacies. There could have been a misunderstanding from their part or on mine, and they probably associated me with English literacy as I was their Communication lecturer who lectured in English, despite constantly reassuring them that this research had nothing to do with my lectures. Perhaps Participant H and F's opinions on what they thought was expected of them

could stem from the fact that English as a language has been given status as a language of power, therefore any language could have been deemed inferior by the participants. In South Africa, despite their being 11 official languages, schools use either English or Afrikaans as mediums of instruction, and they do English or Afrikaans as a home language or first additional language. McKenna's (2004) research refers to the status and power accorded to English within the South African educational fraternity in her research.

4.3.2 The influence of school literacy

4.3.2.1 Code switching of teachers as opposed to lecturers' lack of code switching

Code switching refers to the practice of alternating words between two or more languages or variations of language in conversation (Samarakoon, 2017). The data from the focus group indicated that two participants (C and G) noted that they encountered challenges with academic literacy at the UoT as their former school teachers used to code switch during teaching and learning, whereas lecturers at the university only use English for lecturing purposes. For example, participants noted: "*I think ngishaywa ukuthi ngifunde ezikoleni zabantu, elokshini la khona bekukhulwa isiZulu one way, ngisho othisha iskhathi esiningi bebefundisa in Zulu ne English kanye. Now la, isingsi sodwa, so my schools zingilimazile ngoba ama lecturer akhuluma i English. Manje kunzima uku ajasta*". This translates to: "*I think my problem is the township schools I attended where learners spoke IsiZulu all the time. Even our teachers spoke IsiZulu mainly but mixed with English. Here, at university lecturers speak English only, so it's hard for me to adjust*" (Participant G); and "*I really feel if lecturers can teach us like our high school teachers, speak IsiZulu sometimes it can be much better to understand*" (Participant C). These views were reinforced by Participants G and H from the artefacts as they noted: "*I enjoyed reading, singing and writing in Zulu and English. I was like on holiday*" (Participant G); and "*My early literacy at school-township school, teachers spoke IsiZulu and some English*" (Participant H).

Participant G's artefact

Participant G's artefact was a picture of a clear blue sea that symbolised peace, leisure and tranquillity, under a blue sky with only a few white clouds, indicating comfort within her early literacies. That she compared her early literacy practices with that scene, told me she understood her primary school teachers. The implication was that her understanding of her primary school teachers stemmed from their frequent code switching to her mother tongue. Perhaps her teachers' code switched as they might have thought that learners had not been exposed to English in the home and therefore did not want learners confused. However, I found it a concern and a paradox that even at high school, while her teachers seemed to code switch frequently, they encouraged learners to speak English. Her comprehension of her school literacies yielded confidence and optimism as implied by her artefact.

Participants C and G's comments indicated that they were aware of the influence their school literacies had on their university literacy practices. Participant G seemed to equate her university literacy challenges to her high school teachers' use of code switching. Participant G therefore appeared to feel disadvantaged by township schools she attended, even though during her high school years it probably felt easy and good, hence a "*holiday*". If students experience

happiness, optimism and confidence in an environment with which they can make sense and where they communicate comfortably in their home language, then the medium of instruction in schools and beyond might need re-thinking.

Participant H seemed alarmed by his high school teachers' code switching, which was evident from his literate life history as he noted "*What I always failed to understand was how come teachers expected our English to be good in tests, assignments and exams when most of them did not speak good English themselves. There were teachers who were so bad in English, if they had to compete with some students, students would beat them!*" Participant H had also attended rural and township schools. Perhaps one of the reasons his high school teachers code switched was that some teachers from rural and township schools might have had limited English vocabulary as they were probably second or third language speakers of English. These findings are reinforced by the finding of Kapp (2012), who found that poor language teaching by teachers whose own English proficiency was limited, led to poor English acquisition by ESL learners in township and rural schools. It thus becomes imperative that the DoE invests in the training of teachers in the language of instruction.

4.3.2.2 The influence of attending English-medium schools

The data from the focus group indicated that two of the eight participants (D, E) noted that attending English HL schools had better prepared them for university literacies. For example participants noted "*For me Ma'am, honestly, it's much better because I did English First Language from pre-school to high school, so I don't really struggle to understand rules, it's just that, academic literacy is different from high school literacy*" (Participant D); and "*I could only read and write English from pre-school to high school Ma'am. That's why even at varsity, I am not struggling with understanding English*" (Participant E). What I deduced from the participants' comments was the possibility that they were confident and comfortable with their English linguistic competencies, as they attended English Home Language schools from preschool to secondary school. Perhaps, the former Model C Schools had educators who were better qualified and English Home Language speakers. Participants D and E appeared to link their academic literacy performance to their early literacy in terms of fluency in English. It is also possible that attending former Model C Schools already put them at an English literacy advantage. If these findings are true, they are in line with the findings of Spaull (2013), who found that the schools that were attended by whites during apartheid are today usually better

equipped, as they often have teachers who are more effective than those that served and continue to serve blacks.

However, participant E commented in the focus group: "*high school doesn't really prepare us for university*", appearing to contradict the findings of Spaull (2013). Participant E's comment was his realisation that well-resourced English HL schools, with better qualified English educators did not prepare him to meet the prerequisite university literacy competencies. This opinion could be an indication that the university literacy preparedness goes beyond simply comprehending and speaking English and that the school curriculum, and consequently literacies, possibly failed to prepare participants for these university literacies. These findings are reinforced by the findings of Dukhan, et al. (2016) who found that the South African schooling system robs students of literacy skills due to a failure to cognitively develop and prepare students for university academic literacy practices.

4.3.2.3 The influence of early school literacies

Education/ Learning background	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Total
Attended English-medium crèche/ preschool				1	1				2
Attended rural crèche/ preschool	1								1
Attended township crèche/ preschool		1					1	1	3
Did not attend crèche/ preschool			1			1			2
Attended Former Model C primary school			1			1			2
Attended Former Model C primary school				1	1				2
Attended Indian/Coloured primary school	1	1							2
Attended rural primary school			1						
Attended township primary school						1	1	1	

Information on participants' early schooling background

The above table is an outline of participants' schooling background. Participants D and E attended English-medium preschools, while Participants B, G and H attended township preschools. Participant C and F did not attend either preschool or crèche. Participants D and E went to Former Model C primary and High Schools while Participants A and B attended Indian/Coloured Schools. Participant C attended a rural primary school and Participants F, G and H attended township primary schools.

The data from the focus group revealed that all participants noted the influence of their early school education to their current literacies. Participant A noted "*It was really hard for me to express myself and adjust to the new Indian or Muslim school in Grade 1, as I had been speaking Zulu in a township preschool*". Participant C noted "*Mhalmpe mina Ma'am ukungaqali e pre-school kwangimosha ngoba ngathatha isikhathi ngisho ukwazi ukufunda nokubhala kunezinye izingane kwa Grade. Ngisho namanje mina kufanele ngifunde 10 times into amany amastudents asheshe ayizwe. Kunzima*", which translates to "*Maybe Ma'am, not going to preschool like other children was the reason I even took longer to learn to write in Grade 1 when other learners were already writing. Even now, for me to understand well, I need to do ten time[s more] reading than other students. It's just not easy*". Participant G noted "*Me Miss, elokshini sifunde kakhulu sicula and sikhuluma, sabhala ngesizulu and it was easy. Kodwa into eyashaya ukuthi later e high school na la, ngibe nenkinga yesingisi ngoba angisijwaelanga early*", which translates to "*Me Miss, I went to township primary where we learnt to read, sing and write in IsiZulu and it was easy. Learning in IsiZulu created problems from me later in high school and now. Particularly now because I am not used to speaking and learning in English only*". Participant D indicated "*I went to English pre-school and English primary school. I learnt to write, read and speak English fluently although I had already started reading English books from home. So, for me understanding English here is not a big deal*"

All eight participants seemed to understand the influence of their early schooling to their university literacies. Participant A's comments indicated that she encountered challenges adjusting from an IsiZulu medium pre-school in the rural areas to the Indian/Muslim school, due to an inability to communicate in English. She probably had little to no encounters with English literacy prior to Grade 1, as she had noted in her artefact that her mother used to teach them hymns in IsiZulu. Her pre-school teachers did not feel a need to teach in English as the children were IsiZulu speaking. Participant C appeared aware that her primary school literacies suffered due to the fact that she had not been to pre-school, as she said that she took longer to

learn basic reading and writing. Participant C also attended primary school in rural areas which probably used an IsiZulu medium of instruction in practice. Her ability to link her early literacy struggles to her current literacies indicated her awareness of the influence of her early schooling to her current academic literacy. Participant C's statement revealed that she was willing to work harder than her peers to keep up with the university literacies, which implied that she was optimistic with regard her academic performance. However, she still felt her early literacies had a role to play in her predicament. Similarly, Participant G also noted that her IsiZulu medium pre-school and primary school impacted her English literacies negatively at high school and more so at the university, as lecturers used English as the medium of instruction. Perhaps her school teachers assumed that since most learners were probably from the township, thus ESL speakers, they needed to be taught in the language they understood, which was IsiZulu. On the other hand, teachers might have been ESL speakers and were not comfortable teaching in English. Perhaps some teachers lacked an English qualification as it has been, and still is the case with some rural and township schools (Spaull, 2013). On the other hand, Participant D seemed to realise the advantage brought about by her exposure to an English-medium preschool and primary schools to her academic literacy. Perhaps her displayed contentment with her early schooling is suggestive of the quality of English literacies she was exposed to. It is possible that her teachers were English language specialists and probably first language speakers of the language. These findings are in line with the findings of Lantolf *et al*. (2015) and Vygotsky (1978) who found that the school environment is crucial to learners' literacies in the later years.

Such views were reinforced in literate life histories by seven out of eight participants (A, B, C, D, E, F and G). Participant E noted "*I never struggled with both English and Afrikaans literacies as both languages were compulsory at primary school and the schools I went to later. That is why I don't have a problem with English at varsity*". Participant B noted "*for me Ma'am, it was fun. I used to enjoy primary school literacies because my English teacher taught well. Even here, I'm not perfect but I understand my lecturers*". Both participants seemed to link their understanding of their university literacies to the nature of literacies they were exposed to during their early schooling – perhaps the nature and the environment of the schools they attended were conducive for learning. Both Participants B and E attended English-medium schools. The implication is a sad reality that the fate of some ESL learners' literacies is predestined by the nature of the schools they attend, as these will determine and define their literacies in the later years. This is reinforced by the findings of Lantolf *et al*. (2015) and

Vygotsky (1978) who found that the process of language development is influenced by institutional contexts like schooling amongst others.

4.3.2.4 The influence of high school literacies

The data from the focus group indicated that all participants noted the influence of their high school literacies on their academic literacy. For example, participants noted: "*but inkinga [the problem] was that nganginawo ama basics e English [I did not have basics of English Language]. Lokho kwangihlupha nase [that was a challenge even at] High School, even today*" (Participant F); and "*I feel izikole engifunde kuzo [the schools I went to] have let me down*" (Participant C).

The participants' comments indicated their realisation of a possible link between their high school literacies and their university literacies. A number of factors could have been contributory to participants' apparent lack of English language competencies from high school, including lack of qualified teachers, lack of resources and infrastructure, or that English was a second or third language.

Participants A and B who first attended township and rural crèche schools, and then proceeded to Indian and Coloured English-medium schools, seemed to appreciate the role their later schools had played in their English fluency and comprehension at the UoT. "*For me it's not so bad Ma'am*" (Participant A); and "*My schools helped us somehow…*" (Participant B). Participant A's statement indicates a comparison with her peers who probably had no exposure to the schools she attended. She indicates that she was better prepared to grasp what lecturers required of her, pertaining to the university literacies. However, within her statement, the implication is that she, like other participants also encountered some academic literacy challenges, hence "*not so bad*". Similarly, Participant B's statement is her realisation that even though her high schools did help her prepare for the university, she used the word "*somehow*" – the implication is that she has not been fully equipped with the expected university literacies but she had a foundation to build on. Correspondingly, Participants D and E noted "*I never really struggle with English Ma'am, due to the school I attended*" (Participant D); and "*I generally speak and understand English and Afrikaans very well Ma'am as I indicated I went to English crèche and former Model C schools only*" (Participant E). Participants D and E understand that the high schools they attended put them at a linguistic advantage. They appear to be aware of the benefits received from their former schools. Perhaps their high schools were

privileged with qualified educators who were probably English First Language speakers. It became clear that participants' schooling system had an influence on their academic literacy and their academic performance. These findings are reinforced by the findings of Kapp (2012) who found that that the nature of literacy exposure and instruction in the school determines learners' performance in their later academic years.

Participant G indicated a pattern from school that continued into university. She noted during the focus group that she had "*spelling problems from school*" and "*the same is happening at the university*". While Participant G had been able identify her spelling difficulties, she had not addressed the problem. Perhaps the fact that she still managed to progress to different grades in high school contributed to her seemingly relaxed attitude. That Participant G noted that her lecturers told her to work on her spelling could imply that they were reluctant to teach spelling, as they expected students to possess such a skill.

Confusion from different English teachers at school could have contributed to Participant F's use of the word '*hate*' of school literacies and university literacies; this was revealed by his comment from his literate life history "*My English primary school teachers' confusion and my high school ...even now, I hate English*". Participant F reinforced his comment during the focus group as he noted "*My English teachers let me down*". I probed Participant F further during our one-on-one conversation as I sought to strengthen and deepen my understanding of his story, while trying to understand what seemed like sentiments of anger towards his English teachers throughout his data. His response was "*I think it's too late*". I needed to know why he thought it was too late when it was his first year of his three year-long qualification. He sighed and there was some silence. After what appeared to have been a hard five minutes of silence, he began to cry. For a moment I wondered if I had not pushed him too much, however, I thought he probably needed to cry his anger out. I told him it was okay, and he did not have to say anything anymore if he no longer felt comfortable. I also reminded him that he was allowed to discontinue with research if he so desired. He then began to speak and said "*Ma'am, ngicela ukusho ngesizulu. Lento bengingazi ukuthi yangihlukumeza kanje nokuthi yangidina kanje. Mhlampe, ngempela ngidinga usizo and awuyena owokuqala ukusho lokhu*", which translates to "*Ma'am, may I say this in IsiZulu. I did not realize how this had angered and affected me. Maybe I do really need help and you are not the first person to suggest this*". What I deduced from Participant F's comments was he believed that teachers had a role in destroying the possibility of developing his competence and good performance in English. For a moment I

wondered how many ESL students were in the same predicament as Participant F. Perhaps, Participant F's admission that he needed assistance marked his beginning of psychological and emotional freedom which could impact his personality and academic performance positively. Furthermore, this interaction showed me the crucial role played by the overall school environment in learners' assimilation of a language and learning in totality throughout the learners' academic career. This view is reinforced by the findings of Vygotsky (1978) who found that the nature of interaction between the learner and the teacher will determine the learners' performance in the school and in the later years.

Another pattern that continued from high school into tertiary was revealed by Participants B and C who wrote without proofreading their work. Participant B noted during the interview that "*I still encounter the same challenges at university Ma'am*", and Participant C noted "*mina [me] Ma'am, my problem had always been that I don't check my work after writing then it always has many mistakes*". On being asked why she did not proofread her work, she responded "*Sometimes there's just no time Ma'am*". I probed further during our one-on-one conversation sessions and her response was that she was still struggling to manage her time as she was still trying to adjust. I asked her if she realised that her lack of addressing the same issue that surfaced from high school, was now becoming a pattern that may be detrimental to her academic performance and ultimately her career, and she noted that "*you bring this up again Ma'am, maybe I really need to change*". What I gathered from Participant B's responses was that she had not heeded her high school teachers' words over the years. However, she appeared anxious on how the same pattern affected her academic literacy as lecturers were "*strict*", as the university required a certain level of student performance. It also became clear from Participant B's responses that at times she was using the fact that her home language was IsiZulu as a pretext to get away with her own carelessness. It is possible that she had not been aware that she used this as a defence, blocking her way to academic success, when she could have attempted to manage her time better. Perhaps her demonstration of anxiety with regard to her dropping performance at the university could assist her to realise she needed to change urgently. In addition, Participant B, like Participant C could be representing those participants who needed a change of attitude in order to overcome their linguistic and academic obstacles. Thus, the patterns displayed by the participants show that what children get exposed to and experience in their high school years will influence their school literacies and ultimately their literacies in the later years. This view is in line with sociocultural theory, as this theory operates from the premise that children's environment has an influence on their school performance and

their school environment determines their performance in their later literacies (Vygotsky, 1977; Rose, 2004).

4.3.2.5 The influence of school teaching style versus lecturing

Data from the literate life histories revealed that two of the eight participants (B and D) noted the challenges associated with the difference between school teaching and lecturing in relation to their academic literacy practices and performance. For example, participants noted that "*At high school, teachers spoon-fed us because every teacher wanted his/her subject passed so they even went an extra mile whereas at university lecturers do not care, I must say it is not easy to be my own teacher*" (Participant B); and "*Also, at school, we had study guides and few books to read, at university, must compile my own notes and lectures are quick to remove their slides from projectors*" (Participant D). This opinion was reinforced by Participant B in the focus group who noted: "*I think we are used to being spoon-fed in primary and high school and the lecturer would be saying go read this chapter and that chapter*" (Participant B). It became clear that participants' high school teachers' teaching styles had a role to play in their students' academic literacy performance. Participants' teachers seemed to provide ready-made material to the participants, possibly in an attempt at assisting the participants with progressing to the following grade throughout their schooling years. Both participants D and B had been to English-medium (and assumed to be better) schools, yet their teachers seemed to spoon feed them. While the teachers might have hoped to aid learning, they might have also underprepared the learners for life outside school. Perhaps participants' teachers were concerned with their individual reputations with regard to producing a good pass rate – a factor that could have been detrimental to participants' future literacies. It appears that the South African curriculum fails to thoroughly prepare participants for the university literacies, through the nature of the literacy practices at school. An overreliance on teachers by participants contributed to their challenges pertaining to individual reading, and the searching and gathering of course or module-related material at the UoT. These findings are reinforced by the findings of Tom *et al*. (2013), who found ESL students are overly dependent on their teachers for information.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has narrated the findings on the participants' literacy practices. Field texts generated from participants have been analysed in an attempt to retell participants' stories on their experiences of literacy practices and the participants' understanding of the influences of

their early literacy practices on their current academic literacy. Field texts generated from four instruments were used interchangeably. The findings revealed that the ESL participants each experienced challenges with regard to the literacy practices at the university. Even though participants had different English language backgrounds, they recognised that school literacies did not fully prepare them for the academic literacies at university, a point exacerbated by the fact that academic literacy was mediated in a language that was not their mother tongue. However, participants who had attended English HL schools and had early English language literacy exposure, appeared better prepared for university than those participants who attended rural and township schools with less English exposure. Overall, participants seemed to understand the influence of their earlier literacy practices on their current academic literacy. How participants mediate these literacy practices going forward, remains to be seen.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

In the study, I conducted research using the principles of narrative inquiry, interpretivism and scholarly articles in order to understand literacy practices of English Second Language first year students at a University of Technology. The study adds to the discourses on teacher education, narrative inquiry and interpretivism, thereby contributing to knowledge by showing that with a narrative inquiry research design and an interpretivist approach to research, it is possible to achieve an understanding of participants' lived experiences and then retell their stories on issues pertaining to their literacy practices. In this final chapter, the research findings are synthesised, after which the theoretical, policy, methodological and professional practice implications are considered. The limitations of the study are evaluated and recommendations for further research are provided.

5.2 Main findings

The presentation of the research findings is shaped by the two research questions that guided the study.

5.2.1 What are English Second Language first year University of Technology students' experiences of literacy practices?

From the analyses, challenges that participants faced regarding academic literacy in terms of academic writing, reading for academic purposes, academic English and the lecturers' lecturing styles became apparent.

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that all eight participants noted to have challenges with academic literacy, particularly academic writing for various reasons. While some participants noted a lack of paraphrasing skills, others cited poor referencing and citation skills as a handicap, which resulted in plagiarism. An additional finding emerged from the above finding, as some participants noted the confusion they suffered due to lecturers' inconsistency, as lecturers seemed to have different definitions of plagiarism, a phenomenon catalytic to further confusion from participants in this regard. An implication of such a finding is the possibility that confusion by some lecturers is reflective of their uncertainty and consequently lack of skills to impart academic literacy to students. This finding

is significant, as the institutions of higher learning aim to be quality-orientated and the assumption is usually that all lecturers possess adequate literacy skills, allowing them to have clear interpretations of academic literacy.

The second major finding was that most participants faced challenges with reading for academic purposes due to the voluminous nature of work at a university, lack of fluency in English (the language of instruction at the university), an inability to manage time, and a lack of coping mechanisms, all of which contributed to poor academic performance and an inability to meet deadlines for different modules. The implication of these findings was that participants had not adapted to the new university literacies and that the schooling system appeared not to have prepared them for these university literacies.

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that all eight participants experienced challenges with academic English. Even participants who had attended former Model C schools articulated that their English fluency did not equal academic English, even though fluency did put them at an advantage. The significance of these findings is that academic English is a language on its own, which institutions of higher learning need to make explicit for all students, but more so for English second language students.

Findings also revealed that the use of English as the language of instruction at university posed a challenge for those students whose English background was not solid. For instance, some participants cited lecturers' medium of instruction, English, as one of the contributory factors in failing to comprehend instructions. The pace at which lecturers lecture seemed a handicap for those participants who struggled with the language, as they could not cope with the pace and consequently found it difficult to make notes. These findings suggest that irrespective of their backgrounds in English, English Second Language speakers at an English-medium university found it difficult to assimilate university literacies.

5.2.2 How do English Second Language first year students' understand the influences of their early literacy practices on their current academic literacy?

The second aspect of the study was to examine how English Second Language first year students understood the influences of their early literacy practices on their current academic literacy.

This study indicates that while attending Former Model C schools or an English Home Language school does put English Second Language learners at an advantage in terms of fluency in English compared to the English Second Language learners in township and rural schools, all students are inadequately prepared for university literacies. The implication of this finding is that the school curriculum needs to speak to the university curriculum in terms of the medium of instruction in the school and the nature of literacy activities that learners are exposed to from the school, as well as the role such activities play in preparing learners transition to the university literacies.

Findings also revealed that the qualification or under-qualification of teachers and their English competence have a role to play in the entire academic life of a student, and is evident in the later years. For instance, it seems that some rural and township schools have teachers without the required qualifications, leading to linguistic difficulties in learners. The English Home Language schools seem to have better qualified teachers and thus better equip learners with the language and with greater potential to learn the university literacies. The implication is that if teachers are not qualified and even developed, the disparity in the schooling system will be perpetuated.

Findings reveal that some English Second Language students are failing to master the university literacies as they come from a background where their school teachers utilised code-switching as a tool to assist them to comprehend the content during teaching and learning, a phenomenon unpractised at an English-medium university. Some participants noted that a lack of code switching at the university had contributed to their lack of understanding of academic literacy and consequently their poor academic performance. The current findings add substantially to our understanding of the impact that code switching has on participants' learning and assimilation of the English language.

Another finding revealed that some English Second Language students are failing to cope with academic literacy, particularly academic writing, despite the nature of school they attended. The implication of this finding is that academic literacy is a new concept that students have to grapple with at the university, and that this literacy defines their entire academic performance.

Most participants are failing to cope with the quantity of work at a university. Most participants noted that the quantity of school work they had been exposed to did not prepare them for the university work. The implication of this finding is that lack of prior exposure to extensive work in the schools has resulted in frustrated students who fail to manage their time and struggle to balance the amount of academic work across their modules.

5.3 Theoretical implications

Sociocultural theory underpinned this study as this theory operates from the premise that children and learners' early literacy environment will influence learners' literacies in the later years (Vygotsky, 1978). The sociocultural theory strengthened the argument that learners and children's early literacy practices influence their practices in the later years. My expectation was that those participants who had attended Former Model C schools and English-medium would not encounter challenges with academic literacy, however, this was not the case. The findings showed that university literacies were a challenge experienced by all the participants in one way or the other. Literacy backgrounds do, however, put them at an advantage, as their English fluency allowed better understanding and recovery of concepts, as opposed to their counterparts who did not have as much access to English.

Findings also revealed that all participants believed that their school backgrounds were contributory factors to their assimilation of the new literacies at the university, as all participants felt early exposure to the English-medium environment from the home, and particularly the school, already put some participants at an advantage.

5.4 Policy implications

The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) require some explicit exposure to literacy in the nature of tasks that teachers need to engage learners with (as discussed in Chapter 2), particularly in the Further Education and Training phase. There are some literacy efforts being made, but these activities seem to prove inadequate in terms of preparing learners for academic literacy, as seen in participants' comments about their under-preparedness in assimilating the university literacies – academic writing and reading in particular. The implications of these findings are that both the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education need to jointly construct their curricula so that there is a smooth transition from secondary to tertiary education.

In addition, the Department of Basic Education needs to provide ongoing support to all school teachers to realise that by virtue of being a teacher, they automatically become language teachers as all content subjects from grade 4 are assessed mostly in English. Teachers should therefore focus on both the content and language during content subject assessment, as opposed to content teachers labelling language assessment as a language teacher's role.

As noted in chapter 2, the Language in Education Policy (LiEP), despite having noble intentions to advantage learners through teaching in various home languages, has proven flawed in application, giving rise to a heavy reliance on code switching at s secondary school level, a phenomenon largely unpractised in tertiary institutions. This finding implies that, while it is in the interest of every South African citizen to receive education in their home language, it appears not to be feasible at this point. While the overt language policy, as per the Constitution of the country (South Africa, 2017) and the LiEP is that all eleven languages are official and of equal importance, the implied policy is that either English or Afrikaans are the favoured languages of assessment, at secondary school and particularly at the universities.

Currently the Progression Policy, as per the CAPS documents, states that 30% in a First Additional Language is considered a pass percentage. The implication of this is that any university student who had obtained such a percentage in English for instance, is ready to cope with the university literacies, whereas the opposite has proven a reality with most students, giving rise to questions such as: What are the implications of a lowered progression standard? Who is being advantaged and who is being disadvantaged by this practice, if any at all? Finally, has South Africa compromised quality education under the pretext of equitable language instruction?

5.5 Methodological implications

Using a narrative research design in exploring and understanding the literacy practices of the participants allowed the participants an opportunity to narrate their stories in their own personal ways within a relaxed environment. The methodological implication of the study was my understanding and the participants' understanding of the role played by their early literacy practices on their current academic practices, as narrated by the participants in their stories.

The second implication of using narrative research was that the participants were equipped with various data generation strategies aimed at establishing their timeline or plot of their literacy practices. The use of four creative data generation strategies aided participants in eliciting and narrating their stories on their past and present literacy experiences. The participants were able to make a link between their early literacy practices and the influence those literacies had on their current academic literacies (Puglisi *et al*., 2017).

The third implication of using narrative research was that this design necessitated my working together with the participants throughout the analysis process, thus allowing the participants to clarify and verify their stories. Additionally, the time intensive nature of narrative research, allowed me and the participants enough interactions aimed at demystifying any ambiguities that might have surfaced during each layer of data analysis.

The methodological implication of adopting an interpretivist paradigm, allowed me to interpret and understand participants' early and current literacy experiences and the meanings the participants attached to their realities in terms of the role their previous experiences played on their current academic literacy (Check and Schutt, 2012). This study was therefore able to unearth participant's realities and their perceptions of those realities, yielding findings from participants' authentic perspectives.

By the end of the study, all the participants had a clear understanding of their home literacy environment and conceptions of literacy and academic literacy, and were able to locate different early and current literacy practices in their lives. Additionally, participants were able to make a connection between the roles played by their early literacy practices to their current academic literacy. Furthermore, participants realised that notwithstanding the fact that early literacy practices influence their academic literacies, academic literacy, particularly academic writing and academic English, were largely 'foreign' to all participants and needed to be treated by both the schools and the universities as such. Participants regarded participation in this study as an eye opener, as they discovered and shared deeper insights about themselves regarding the challenges they faced, and realised that they were to be largely responsible for their own mastery of academic literacy. For one particular participant, the entire research process was both therapeutic and cathartic as he engaged with the harboured emotions of anger emanating from some negative experiences encountered during his early English literacy experiences in the school.

5.6 Professional practice implications

Findings revealed that academic literacy, particularly academic writing, is a challenge to all participants despite the schools they attended prior to university. An implication of these findings is that both academic writing and academic English should be considered as new, unknown concepts when students enter the universities. Universities of Technology, and other higher education institutions, need to ascertain who their students are, with what skills and knowledge they arrive, and then make explicit what academic literacy is, why it is essential for study, and how to negotiate the requirements thereof. Students should not be expected to know and lecturers should not assume that high schools have scaffolded such skills.

As a potential academic, the findings of this study have allowed me a better understanding on the experiences and challenges faced by some of the English Second Language first year university students. Going forward, I have learnt that academic literacy remains a new concept for first year university students, despite their literacy backgrounds and should be treated as such.

Perhaps universities make assumptions about students and where they come from. Maybe we make assumptions about students based on race, gender, socio-political and socioeconomic factors. We also make assumptions on students based on which schools they went to and so we assume if they went to a former Model C schools with English Home Language teachers, they possess a sense of competence in the English language, and academic literacy. On the contrary, I have learnt that higher education and academic writing is no one's home language and academic writing needs to be taught to everyone, irrespective of their backgrounds.

5.7 Limitations of the study

Like most studies, this study had its share of limitations. The first limitation involved a display of misunderstanding of the term 'literacy' by some participants, as they seemed to equate literacy to English literacy, and only mentioned their experiences with English, whereas they probably experienced literacy activities in their home languages in their households and other environments, such as places of worship and clubs, among others. Perhaps their confusion was rooted in the fact that I was their English Communication lecturer using English during lectures. However, during various interactions with the participants throughout the study, I

tried to clarify that literacy included proficiency in languages other than English. I explained that literacy practices from the home included oral traditions, the games they played and other forms of interactions they might have had with their peers, caregivers and parents, amongst others. Perhaps, in future research, such clarity needs to be more explicit.

The second limitation was recognised when it became clear that some participants provided conflicting responses across data generating instruments. While the use of four data generating sources allowed for greater triangulation, I perhaps needed to be more sensitive to participants' need to appear to be saying the 'right' thing. In retrospect, I should have assured them more.

5.8 Areas for future research

This dissertation considers three recommendations for further study.

- Research could be undertaken to explore how to bridge the gap between school literacies and university literacies to enable a smooth transition from school to university.
- Research could be done to understand what university lecturers consider to be the prerequisites for university entrance.
- Research could be undertaken to devise creative student-friendly ways to equip and empower university students with ongoing literacy support services.

5.9 Conclusion

Even when students' early literacy exposure in the home, and even when the school better prepares them for mastery and assimilation of the new university literacies, academic literacy in general, and academic writing in particular, remains a challenge to English Second Language first year university students. Drawing on narrative research and interpretivism, this research was able to understand the students' literacy practices from their early to current academic literacies. Through this research, results showed that there needs to be a smoother transition from school to university. Curricula in schools need to speak to the curricula at universities. Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education, amongst others, need to enable mediation between the two sectors. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on literacy

practices and narrative research by providing knowledge regarding literacy practices of English Second Language first year students at a University of Technology.

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APPENDICES